

The background of the book cover is an impressionistic painting. On the left side, there is a dark, textured shape in shades of green and blue, resembling a dense bush or a rocky outcrop. The rest of the image is a soft, hazy landscape with a palette of light blues, purples, and pinks, suggesting a misty or sunlit scene. The brushstrokes are visible and expressive, giving it a painterly feel.

SILENCE
in Catullus

BENJAMIN ELDON STEVENS

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Silence in Catullus

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Silence in Catullus

Benjamin Eldon Stevens

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Dedicated to everyone whose years of patient listening helped to
make this book on silence possible

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Preface and Acknowledgments

Silence in Catullus argues that the first-century BCE Roman poet Gaius Valerius Catullus shows a deep and varied interest in silence as it may play important roles in poetry and as it relates to human being-in-language more generally. In particular I argue that Catullus's interest in silence is an intentional and significant aspect of his poetics: we may say that Catullus has a "poetics of silence." This argument is intended to be of interest to scholars and advanced students of Catullus, of other Latin poets, and of ancient poetry more generally. Although certain parts of the argument are specialized or technical, I hope that this book will nonetheless also prove useful to undergraduate students of Latin, many of whom study Catullus at some point in their careers. Finally, I hope that the book will find readers among scholars, students, and others who are interested in silence as it figures in literature and other arts as well as in our lived experience.

Silence in Catullus is one way of expressing my gratitude to the many professors, colleagues, students, and friends with whom I have had the pleasure of thinking about Catullus over the years. I owe my interest in Catullus most directly to Ernst Fredericksmeier, under whom I first studied Latin at the University of Colorado at Boulder in the spring of 1996, and to David Wray, under whom I studied Latin poetry at the University of Chicago in the winter quarter of 1999. Their love of Latin poetry was infectious, and I hope that this book is felt to honor their inspirational teaching and scholarship. I began to draft chapters about silence in Catullus some ten years later, in the fall of 2009, while on a one-semester sabbatical from teaching at Bard College. At Bard I had the opportunity to teach Catullus, whether in the Latin or in translation, to more than one hundred students in nine courses over eight years; the

effect of that experience on this work is incalculable. The manuscript was accepted for publication by the University of Wisconsin Press in the late spring of 2012 and was submitted to the press in final form in latest summer of that year; the very last stages of work on the book were completed while I was a visiting assistant professor at Hollins University, and I am grateful for the support I received there. Friends and family with whom I spent nominal vacations at various points in the process deserve both thanks and, as fellow authors will understand, heartfelt apologies.

Silence in Catullus would not have reached its present form as this book without the assistance and insights of all those people as well as others. The anonymous scholars who reviewed the manuscript for the press helped me to see many aspects of Catullus and Catullan scholarship more clearly. I was supported throughout by colleagues at Bard; among them, Carolyn Dewald deserves special thanks for valuable feedback on several drafts, and Brett M. Rogers should know that he is a gift as colleague and friend. Special thanks are also due those individuals at the press who helped to guide the project on its way from manuscript to book, including Adam Mehring, managing editor; Sheila McMahon, editor; William Aylward and Patricia A. Rosenmeyer, general editors of the press's Classics series as well as faculty of the University of Wisconsin; Raphael Kadushin, senior acquisitions editor; and Matthew Cosby, acquisitions assistant. Other individuals and groups are thanked for particular assistance or insights in the notes.

Silence in Catullus

Introduction

Toward a Poetics of Silence in Catullus

Venus takes pleasure in wordy talk.

55.20: *uerbosa gaudet Venus loquela*

The topic of “silence in literature” has received special scholarly attention following the First and Second World Wars.¹ Perhaps naturally a focus has been on the literature of those periods and later.² This may give an impression that silence in literature is a particularly modern phenomenon. Indeed, it has seemed to some readers that certain modern events have resulted in special forms of “silence of literature,” as literature has struggled to respond to those events meaningfully. To take perhaps the most famous example, it has thus been said that there can be no poetry after Auschwitz.³ But human history of course did not wait for the twentieth century to include what literary tradition might consider unspeakable. More generally, an interest in what goes unsaid—whether because it should not be spoken or because it is beyond the capacity of speech—would seem to be something of a natural corollary of human being-in-language. We should therefore not be surprised to find sustained and significant engagement with silence in the literature of earlier periods. As an example of how we may study silence in earlier literature, in this book I examine the first-century BCE Roman poet Catullus. What might Catullus teach us about silence in literature and as an aspect of human being-in-language? Conversely, what might such an investigation teach us about Catullus, Latin poetry, and perhaps ancient literature more generally?

Overhearing Silence in Catullus

As a first illustration of Catullus's interest in silence, we may briefly consider c. 55 ("I ask, if by chance it isn't a bother"; *Oramus, si forte non molestum est*); this will serve to motivate some contextual and theoretical considerations. Catullus concludes c. 55 by commanding his addressee, Camerius, to tell his story (vv. 15–22):

Tell me where you'll be, say it boldly,	15
out with it, bring it into the light.	
Are you at this moment kept by "milky-white" girlfriends?	
If you keep your tongue in a closed mouth,	
you'll throw away all of love's fruits:	
Venus takes pleasure in wordy talk.	20
But if you want, you can bar your palate,	
so long as you let me share in your love!	
 dic nobis ubi sis futurus, ede	15
audacter, committe, crede luci.	
nunc te lacteolae tenent puellae?	
si linguam clauso tenes in ore	
fructus proicies amoris omnes:	
uerbosa gaudet Venus loquela.	20
uel, si uis, licet obseres palatum,	
dum uestri sim particeps amoris. ⁴	

Part of the pleasure of this poem is how Catullus suspects that he knows Camerius's story already. Readers familiar with Catullus will not be surprised that what he suspects to lie behind his friend's silence is a love affair. We will have much more to say about Catullus's interest in sexuality, and its links to orality and silence, in chapter 2. In the meantime, for our introductory purposes we may note first that there is evidently a silence in the context of which Catullus, figured as the poem's speaking-subject, seems to speak. He wants that silence to be broken, hence his command to Camerius; but it is not broken, hence Catullus himself may or even must "speak" in the form of the poem. In the poem's fiction, then, the poet is able to speak because someone else is silent. C. 55 would seem to draw special attention to this situation. The potential interlocutor's silence is emphasized by contrast, as the speaker draws attention to Camerius's capacity for speech in the concrete forms of his mouth and tongue. Camerius's anatomical capacity for speech serves to emphasize what we might call his "occasional"

incapacity, his lack of speech at the moment of the poem due to how his speech apparatus would seem, at least in Catullus's imagination, to be occupied.

By contrast, the poem begins with the poet-speaker's own act of speech: "I ask" (v. 1: *oramus*). Although there is no mention of Catullus's mouth or tongue, the fact of his extended speech elevates his capacity as a speaker over Camerius's. We may thus wonder whether Catullus's interest in Camerius's story is sincere. There is the ironic possibility that he is rather happier with what he has already got, namely, silence. As we are seeing, it is precisely that silence on the part of a potential interlocutor that affords the poet opportunity to speak. On this reading it would seem to be meaningful indeed that c. 55 effects a general transition from an opening request ("I ask"; v. 1: *oramus*) to a concluding series of commands ("tell me"; v. 15: *dic nobis*, plus the imperatives that follow). What began as a request about another person's story becomes—or is revealed to have been all throughout—a rather more self-interested or self-impressed demonstration of the poet's own capacities. In the final lines (vv. 20–22) Catullus seems to move farther away from interest in any details of Camerius's story and conversely toward his own capacity as storyteller. If "Venus takes pleasure in wordy talk" (v. 20: *uerbosa gaudet Venus loquela*), then her source of pleasure here is not so much the silent Camerius as Catullus, the only one who speaks. In this way a poem that is ostensibly interested in discovering what lies behind a person's silence serves in fact to disclose the poet's dependence on silence as such: ironically, Catullus is better served by Camerius's silence than he would have been by the man's speech.

It seems then that c. 55, beginning and ending as it does with the poet as speaker, advertises the poet's extraordinary capacity for speech. One is led to imagine that, should he succeed in taking part in Camerius's love affair, Catullus's own speech apparatus would not be so preoccupied that he could not still fashion a poem out of the experience. Perhaps c. 55 is to be imagined as being such a poem, and Catullus as quietly wishing us to understand that he knows as much as he claims to not from intuition but from firsthand experience. Such speculation aside, from this perspective c. 55 serves as a first illustration of how much of Catullus's poetry may be read as entering into relationships with silence. Although of course this varies according to the poem, a relationship with silence is pervasive and important enough in the collection that I believe we may speak meaningfully of Catullus as having a poetics of silence.

Aspects of a Poetics of Silence: Overhearing and Human Being-in-Language

In general, Catullus may be read as taking what is an ordinary condition of language, its complex relationship to silences of various kinds, and making it an essential feature of his extraordinary poetry. I argue that he does this deliberately, attending to silence not at random but as an essential aspect of his experience as a person, a poet, and, more generally, as a being-in-language. As he runs that gamut, the silences involved include “sociocultural” and “natural” types, ranging from the silences that precede, structure, and follow utterance; through the sort of silence that marks what may or may not be said according to cultural traditions and social controls; to what is perhaps the ultimate natural silence, the absolute silence of death. Catullus is deeply invested in telling the sorts of stories that might otherwise go untold. Indeed, we might say that one of Catullus’s most characteristic practices as a poet is to draw attention to his own poetic act of speech insofar as it breaks what he represents as a silence.

Like c. 55, then, many poems thus give a strong impression of being “overheard,” as if the poetic speech fills a silence or pause in what the poet implies is an ongoing conversation.⁵ In this connection the study of silence in a poetry like Catullus’s adds nuance to our understanding of how ancient poetry figures itself quite often as speech, with poems serving as “scripts” for oral performance. Our impression that ancient poetry was intended for, and received in, performance is not substantially changed by the relatively recent demonstration that, contrary to older opinions, ancient readers could indeed read silently to themselves.⁶ As Johnson cogently argues, moreover, a starkly binary formulation of “reading aloud” as if opposed to “reading silently” predisposes the question against more-detailed investigation of ancient sociologies of reading. We may thus understand Catullus’s poetry as recommending itself for mixtures of both oral performance and silent reading, as well as responding to such mixtures, whose complexities have yet to be completely teased out.⁷ As part of a poetics of silence, then, Catullus explores the boundaries between such things as voice or speech and silence, preservation of text and its destruction, and materiality or mortality of texts and language users alike. Such experiences and somewhat abstract themes are given vivid, concrete forms in Catullus’s quite recognizable “voice” as it breaks certain silences and attends to others.

This matters for the study of Catullus in particular and Latin poetry

more generally in connection with the argument that the materiality of text played a crucial role in the ancient emergence of anything like a Catullan voice: a voice that seems immediately present to us as well as coherent in its representation of a unitary subject. Miller thus argues that only in compositions designed for rereading from text may there emerge "the lyric consciousness" that is, on this reading, at first peculiar to Catullus: "a profoundly articulated interiority, with its internal complexities, ambivalences, and contradictions," that depends on "the capability of the reader of a written text to reverse course and move backwards and forwards at will as to produce qualitative change in the nature of the subjectivities."⁸ In Miller's view, the relationship between textual material and poetic voice is bound up in material: "Even more fundamental than writing to the production of this multileveled interiority, which allows the projection of a lyric consciousness, is the advent of the poetry collection and the poetry book."⁹

The consequential relationship thus imputed between textual materiality and the poetic voice as it asserts a subjectivity is emphasized and nuanced by a poetics of silence. By attending to the counterpart to speech, a poetics of silence links the materiality of text, the poetic voice, and the mortality of the poet as all must eventually seem to pass. Text fades, the voice breaks or likewise fades away, and the poet himself eventually stops completely from speaking. We will thus see Catullus engaging with the sorts of natural silences that affect speaking beings, ranging from the absence of articulate speech that traditionally signifies human conversation to the absolute silence, the ultimate cessation of all sound including language, in death.¹⁰ From this perspective, Catullus's poetics of silence includes not merely such concrete silences as those, like sexualized silences, that preclude or occlude articulate speech, but also the more abstract silence that would quiet the human voice.

This wide-ranging and nuanced attention to silence results in poems that are not simply assertive or boastful in their being overheard but are also more complexly investigative of poetry and language in the world. What we might call Catullus's Roman aggression, his "poetics of manhood," is thus balanced in places by a subtler seduction of the reader as a fellow language user.¹¹ Going a step further, Catullus can also be sly or even chary in his consideration of the conditions that affect us all as beings-in-language. Although Catullus clearly delights in saying aloud what otherwise is not said or, perhaps especially, should not be said, from this perspective his aim is not so much prurient as, I would say, to record the subject's desire for meaningful utterance across the

gap of silence. In Catullus's poetics, silence is simultaneously exciting, even liberating, and something that threatens the possibility of meaning and, in the end, of human being insofar as that being is essentially a being-in-language.

How to Overhear Catullus's Interest in Silence

How may we develop these readings? If poetry, perhaps especially ancient poetry, is naturally understood as a sort of utterance, how may we read poems for their silences as well as for their interest in silence?

I take as a basic principle a central idea in sensorial anthropology, namely, that something seemingly so physical as "the senses" is in fact a matter of cultural construction.¹² From this perspective, "silence" is of interest not so much as natural acoustic fact, that is, as an actual absence of sound, objectively available to sensation, but rather as a sociocultural fiction made meaningful by the subjective and intersubjective experience of those beings positioned as perceptrs. Silence is thus not simply discovered but more complexly invented by active processes of sense perception and, in the discursive world of a poem, by the imagination of poet and reader or audience member alike. As a result, what matters is whether a sense-perceptual experience is understood to be soundless enough to pass beneath a perceived lower bound from "sound" to "silence." By the same token, we may say that a silence has been broken when something is spoken unusually, that is, when it otherwise is not, may not, or should not be spoken.

With culture in mind, in this connection we may say that a metaphorical silence frequently and delightfully broken by Catullus is that imposed by social controls and cultural traditions, in a word by discourse, on speakers as enculturated beings as well as on certain topics of conversation. From this perspective, certain poetic acts of speech take on additional resonance in a poetics of silence. Even certain poems that have seemed trivial, "making a silk purse out of a sow's ear," may thus be read as challenges to what has been called the "to-be-said," the totality of what may be said according to a given tradition.¹³ By violating certain cultural constraints on speech including linguistic taboos, Catullus contributes to contemporaneous innovation in Roman literary images of "deep silence," the silence that structures the cultural conversation writ large.¹⁴ In other words, by saying aloud what *may not* be said or *should not* be said, Catullus hints at a sort of illicit, somewhat

tacit relationship between his poetry and the actuality of lived experience. As certain poems make clear, there are stories still to be told about the Muses' furtive interest in the underbelly, about poetry's capacity to proceed independently of traditional topics or positions of authority. In this way, the study of silence in Catullus's poetry adds depth and nuance to our sense of his delight in being overheard. In particular we stand to overhear him breaking certain silences, summoning forth what more traditional modes of discourse, perhaps especially epic, have kept behind closed doors.

Catullus and "Catullus": The Historical Poet and the Persona in the Poems

Catullus's capacity to speak outrageously must have provided a giddy pleasure, perhaps a guilty one, in the context of an elite Roman literary society that constantly evaluated its members according to their success in discourse, in and through language use including ordinary conversation as well as poetry.¹⁵ Allowing ourselves some speculation, we may thus wonder whether Catullus's attention to silence comes in part from a less-than-completely successful attempt, as he might have felt it, at integrating himself into that elite society.¹⁶ As we will see, Catullus certainly jokes that he has felt himself to be excluded from hearing certain stories; in line with his pervasive irony, it may be that such humor quietly discloses a deeper, more serious feeling of exclusion. In this way, the speaker's ironic distance would be not only or mainly an artifact of artificial language but also perhaps an effect of the poet's *actual* distance in terms of his difference from Roman society. Catullus's demonstrable delight in speaking outrageously aloud would thus also quietly betray a silence he generally keeps about his outsider's perspective.

This reading would of course be speculative about Catullus's biography as well as incomplete about the poetry. In this connection it is important to emphasize, as is well known, that Catullus hardly survives from antiquity, in a way that complicates the question of how much of what has been preserved represents even his intentions for the poems, much less the man himself.¹⁷ Many of the poems take the form of direct speech, in a voice recognizably "the same" across them: in many of the poems one can recognize what has been called the same lyric consciousness. But it is an open and contested question whether the subject of that consciousness, "Catullus" as the speaking subject in the poems, speaks

in such a way that Catullus, the historical poet, is represented. In connection with certain poems, this question will let us wonder whether, when poetry is read, it depends on or even enforces a silence of its historical author. It has been shown that any suggestion of autobiography in the Catullan corpus is complicated, perhaps even vitiated, by the poems themselves.¹⁸ In general, Catullus's poetry quite self-consciously or ironically takes part in a Roman rhetorical culture that assumed that a speaker's character is constituted by the act of speaking and so interpreted it as consisting in the speech, not necessarily in a separable private life. It seems that Roman speakers and listeners, as well as authors and readers, recognized such a discursive "self" as something of a fiction. But the ideological claim was that the public self was representative of the private self, and, in a way, more virtuous than it.

There is, then, little or nothing like a stable "author" on whom light may be shed by the poems. To reach for a more apposite metaphor, we might say that the particular silence left unbroken by the poems is that applying to their author, the historical poet: on present evidence, the poems' image of Catullus cannot be checked against an independent image of the man. In the following chapters I attempt to refer to persona and poet in a way that reflects this situation, distinguishing especially between the "speaking subject" of the poems and the historical poet. But I also feel free to use "Catullus" as the conventional shorthand for the author, the speaker of many poems, and the collection as a whole. As Janan puts it, Catullus "gives me something to call the speaker and a frame to an open-ended inquiry. But his name tells me nothing in advance about him or his poetry and should never close off a question."¹⁹

Silence as Meaningful Difference: A Perceived Insufficiency of Signification

If we doubt the poems' authenticity in representing an actual author even as we seem to overhear him in his own voice, in all his lyric consciousness—"the Catullus we meet in the poems is a fiction, although he cannot be entirely fictitious"—we may note more positively that the poems constitute that fictional persona, as well as other speaking subjects, in part by combining to form a system of meanings among themselves.²⁰ Whatever we may think about the arrangement of the poems, we cannot doubt that as they currently stand they work together—with, on, and against one another—to constitute their own

meanings within a system of meanings.²¹ All of this is to say that the poems constitute a sign system. As a result, and in a way by definition, the collection stands to include instances of “silence” defined as a perceived insufficiency of signification within that system. To clarify this point, I briefly discuss here how a sign system like literature may be understood as defining silence in this way. I then conclude this introduction with a final consideration of certain aspects of Catullan scholarship that will help later to contextualize the readings in the chapters.

Spoken language or utterance is literally defined by silence: without the limits set by silence, language is not set off from other sounds as comprehensible or from other systems of signs as especially meaningful. It does not matter whether the silence in question is absolute, namely, a total absence of sound, or relative, that is, quiet enough to pass beneath a perceived upper bound into soundlessness, although relative silence would seem to be more common in the actual experience of language users.²² In other words, what matters is not an actual acoustic situation but the fact that silence is, as it were, present enough to be perceived as such by beings whose business it is to distinguish silence from sound. It may be that such beings are themselves distinguished or characterized by their perceptions of where silence ends and sound or utterance begins. We will have more to say about this possibility with reference to certain poems discussed later.

In the meantime, the salient point is that silence, like other constituents of a sign system, is a matter of the perception of meaningful difference between signs.²³ This is worth emphasizing: like other signs, including utterance, *silence as it may be defined by meaningful difference is a potentially significant sign*. From this perspective, both relative silence and, perhaps more surprisingly, absolute silence may be meaningful signs. This situation, in which meaning is carried by a perceived change of density of signification in a system, results in more than a pragmatics of silence, in which, for example, silence may serve as a rhetorical device in conversation. There is here the possibility of silence being constituted as a meaningfully different sort of sign that will reward dedicated consideration in its own terms.

This possibility helps to make of silence as a sign something more substantial than total absence. At a logical extreme, the unsaid is precisely everything other than what is said; this totality would seem to be so undifferentiated as to mean little or nothing, hence a historical emphasis on utterance over just such silence. From our current perspective, we may say that much more interesting than the total negative

space surrounding and delimiting a literary work is the work's own sense of negation, selection-against, and suppression as necessary pre-conditions and co-conditions of its own being as an utterance. Whether or not a work of literature is *interested in* or is *about* silence (or kinds of silence, including the unsayable or the ineffable), its existence as an act of language is structured *around* silence. This fact may be recognized in a work's sense of its own necessary relation to silence, of silence as the very condition of its possibility. In reading a poem for its silences, we may therefore attend to both its negative spaces, in the sense of actual silences, omissions, or suppressions, and its approach to those spaces, the particular ways in which it hovers over them, the moods in which it thinks about how silences of various kinds relate to language art and to being-in-language.

Two Aspects of Catullan Scholarship: The Text and the Collection

In the preceding section I attempted to justify attention to various silences, defined as perceived insufficiency of signification in a sign system, in literature in general. We may pay particular attention to those works that take the necessary, linguistic fact that utterance is structured by silence and make it essential to their literary fictions. In this way we stand to attend not simply to silence in literature but to what I have called a poetics of silence. Of course, the purpose of this book is to argue that Catullus has such a poetics of silence by developing readings of certain poems. The manner of those readings has been exemplified by a brief reading of c. 55. Before describing how those readings and the themes they suggest are organized into the plan of the book, I conclude this introduction by noting a particularly evocative connection between Catullus and silence. As noted earlier, Catullus would be more or less unknown to us were it not for his poems, and only some of them speak in the persona of Catullus, which in turn may or may not correspond to the historical poet. For our purposes, moreover, it is evocative that we must range our real ignorance of Catullus's life alongside the way in which even the poems themselves, the texts, were almost completely lost. Although textual questions will not preoccupy us in this study, two aspects of the situation may be summarized briefly here.

The earliest manuscript from which all other extant manuscripts are direct or indirect copies, the archetype, is lost, and "as every mod-

ern editor makes clear, our present text of Catullus rests on three late-fourteenth-century manuscripts known as OGR, all extremely faulty."²⁴ Some of the faults are obvious, including clearly ungrammatical constructions as well as additions by scribes (e.g., marginalia, titles). Others are subtler, even undecidable, including variant spellings, especially in word endings, and acceptable grammatical substitutions of one word for another. The earliest manuscripts also combine poems that scholarship has since separated: "what we now know as a corpus of (more or less) 113 poems comprised no more than 53 in the archetype, and quite probably fewer."²⁵ It must be said that these basic problems for textual criticism have not all been solved to the satisfaction of a majority of Catullan scholars. Indeed, it seems unlikely that certain textual problems will admit solution. Different modern editions of Catullus's text can show great differences from one another, and in general there are many places where we cannot be sure that our reconstructed text would have been recognized by the original author as correct.²⁶

For our purposes, however, perhaps more evocative is how "Catullus"—the man as metonym for his writings—seems to have survived antiquity into the late medieval period in a single copy that itself is now lost. One more fire or filing error and the persona of Catullus, and with him most of what we think we may know about Catullus the historical poet, would have been virtually silenced forever. As noted earlier, there are some independent testimonia, but these are not substantial in comparison with the poems themselves. Catullus is therefore decidedly precarious in speech; our access to his being-in-language is an extremely happy accident involving his poems' materiality, their being-in-text. It seems to me that this tenuous situation is one that a poet so interested in the relation between language and silence would have appreciated.²⁷

A second kind of textual problem, one that may bear on certain interpretations, is that the amount of material, while not large by the standards of modern publishing technology (i.e., fitting easily into a single book or *codex*), is arguably too much to have fit into a single ancient scroll. Whereas we typically have all the poems in a single printed volume, in antiquity the poems were probably divided among three scrolls; and those were of course hand-copied.²⁸ This difference between ancient and modern book technology raises the question of how the poems were and are to be arranged in the corpus, indeed whether they are to be considered as a single collection, and therefore how they were and are intended to be read. A particular question has been whether the current arrangement of the poems, in the form of scholarship's correction

of the tradition, reflects at all the original author's intent. Scholars are of various opinions on the matter.²⁹

As with the state of the text, for our purposes here we may ignore the details of the collection's arrangement to focus on an implication of the general situation; certain "sequences" of poems are discussed in greater detail later in this study. As noted already, the collection of Catullus's poems is a rich site for exploring "the death of the author," in other words, for considering the manner and meaning of his transition from historically utterant (he actually spoke and represented speech in writing) to literally and literarily silent (he no longer speaks except through [our reading of] what he wrote).³⁰ Silence therefore seems to me a natural way into the words this poet has left behind. It is a way into thinking about how they have survived him, how they may relate to the historical author's silence even as they continue the fictionalized subject's capacity for speech. From this perspective, certain of Catullus's poems stand to teach us a great deal about human aspects of silence and thus about our own relationship to the language or discourse that may yet silence us even as it seems to preserve us. Catullus's presence and absence is curiously, self-consciously mixed: he has ensured that we may only seem to overhear him, never truly connect; and aspects of the textual tradition have accidentally reinforced this. As such, Catullus may echo our own experience, what we take to be a very modern experience, of being at home in language only incompletely. A study of Catullus's poetry with silence in mind thus helps us to understand how our own being-in-language is affected by language's freighted relationship with silence.

The General Argument

To make the argument that Catullus not only was interested in silence but developed a true poetics of silence, I seek to read certain poems in the way briefly illustrated earlier with reference to c. 55. I pay special attention to the following elements: the poems' sounds, as they must rise up from, relate to, and ultimately recede into a background of silence; their internal silences, including pauses or other similar, structural features that suggest themselves in reading; what we might call their external silences, including both sociocultural and natural silences imposed on characters including the speaker as well as on the ideal audience (in

the Latin, they are “listeners,” *audientes*); and their more abstract or even philosophical treatments of silence as a theme. Likewise, I read with attention to how the poems must have been read aloud, may be read aloud still, may be said to “know” that they were to be read aloud, and thus “know” something about their own relationships to silence and sound or utterance. All of this seems to me to be consonant with Catullus’s own taste for poetry of a certain complexity and sophistication.

This book is my attempt at, as it were, recording that extended reading aloud: a kind of transcription of how the various silences of certain of Catullus’s poems enrich our understanding of those poems and, I think, deepen our sense of silence as a feature of poetry more generally, of literature, of the world. As Catullus’s poetry beautifully figures, silence is in fact silences multiple and various, not only factual or actual but fictional or fashioned, entering into complex relationships with human meaning-making or signification. As noted, this wide range of silences includes both sociocultural and natural types, for example, the ostentatiously conspiratorial quiet of a friend whose story is, it seems, simply too good not to be told (if also, perhaps, too good to be true), as in c. 6, discussed in chapter 1; the charged and charming silence of a sort of “morning after,” as in c. 50, discussed in chapter 3; and the silence to which all human utterance would seem to tend, the absolute silence of death, as in cc. 65, 68, and 101, discussed in chapters 4 and 5. From these and other examples, Catullus’s poetry is productively read as taking silence as an inevitable fact of language and making of it something more. In this sense I would say it is meaningful indeed to speak of Catullus as having a poetics of silence.

Attending to Catullus’s silences stands not only to enrich our reading of the poems but also to deepen our sense of silence in the world more generally, as it forms a meaningful part of our being-in-language. I therefore hope that this book will be of interest to students of classical language and literature as well as of literature, especially poetry, more generally; to students of linguistics and semiotics; and to those interested in silence, including those interested in its sociology, its anthropology, and its philosophy. In classical studies in particular, the book is intended to join in conversations with such works on Catullus as those of McNeill (2010), Wray (2001a), Krostenko (2001), Nappa (2001), Fitzgerald (1995), Miller (1994), Richlin (1992), and Quinn (1969). Most generally, attending to silence complements and deepens a long-standing interest in ancient ideas about language, especially its

relationship to human being, for example, that of Montiglio (2000), Gera (2003), and Heath (2005), the last of whom summarizes the prevailing ancient conception as one in which “humans speak; animals don’t.”³¹

If “humans speak,” we may add that, as a natural result with cultural consequences, their silence is meaningful. In the confines of a given social situation or culture, this allows for a “pragmatics of silence,” in which silence is one among many rhetorical possibilities in utterance. Just such a pragmatics has recently been studied productively in Catullus.³² In lived experience more generally, the possibility of meaningful silence, of silence defined somewhat paradoxically as a nothing that somehow signifies, means that an important part of human existence is its relationship to silence and, ultimately, meaninglessness. In a crucial paradox, the human relation to meaning is crossed by a relation to silence. Silence and significance may not go hand in hand, but they do go together.

Plan of the Book

I organize my reading of Catullus as follows.

Chapter 1, “Natural and Sociocultural Silence in C. 6,” focuses on c. 6, out of whose richly sense-perceptual poetry we may develop a first sense of Catullus’s poetics of silence. Provocative in this regard is c. 6’s own relative silence, at the hands of critics and in the memory of many readers, in comparison especially to cc. 5 and 7. When a poem is read aloud, who speaks and, as a result, who is silent or silenced? Chapter 1 draws on sensorial anthropology (e.g., Classen 1993; Howes 1991; Stevens 2008a) and studies that have emphasized “positionality” and lyric consciousness in Catullus (Fitzgerald 1995; Lyne 1978; Miller 1994).

Chapter 2, “Orality and Sexualized Silence in Cc. 5, 7, 74, 80, 88, 116, and 16,” develops an image of Catullus’s interest in sexualized silences. How do articulate speech, occlusive silence, oral sexuality, and sexual violence relate in his poetry? Chapter 2 engages with works treating Catullus and Roman sexuality (e.g., Hallett and Skinner 1997; Lateiner 1977; Richlin 1992; Skinner 1989, 2005).

Chapter 3, “Poets, Poems, and Poetry: Cc. 22 and 36 (plus 50),” focuses on how Catullus may be read as responding to the fact of society’s fiction, that is, to social aspects of the linguistic fact that utterance, including poetry, is ultimately bounded by silence. When poems are read aloud, does “poetry” in general also sound and, if so, with what effects

on human voices? Chapter 3 draws on work on poetry or literature as a kind of social exchange (e.g., Selden 1992; Fantham 1996; Tatum 1997; and Taplin 2000).

Chapter 4, "The Natural Silence of Death, Part 1: Cc. 65 and 68(a)," begins a focus on poems dealing with the death of Catullus's brother; this focus continues into chapter 5, "The Natural Silence of Death, Part 2: Cc. 65 and 101 (with 96, 100, and 102)." How does Catullus—and how may we—respond to a silence that is not "sociocultural" or susceptible but seemingly "natural" as well as ineluctable, namely, the absolute silence of death? Chapters 4 and 5 discuss work on the death poems (e.g., Biondi 2007; Conte 1986; Feldherr 2007a).

Finally, drawing together threads from the preceding chapters, chapters 6 and 7, "'Feminized' Voices and Their Silences, Part 1: C. 64" and "'Feminized' Voices and Their Silences, Part 2: Cc. 63 and 51," focus on women's voices and silences, paying special attention to Catullus's figuration of himself in relationship to "feminized" figures in cc. 64, 63, and 51, the last in some comparison with Sappho's c. 31. How are genders figured by literature as relating to silence in different ways? What does it mean that Catullus represents himself, when at his most quieted, in terms recalling "feminized figures"? Chapters 6 and 7 have in mind work on women's voices in ancient literature (e.g., Greene 1998; Lardinois and McClure 2001; Skinner 2005), on Catullus and Sappho in particular (e.g., Greene 1999; Miller 1993), and on the question of influence in Latin poetry generally (e.g., Conte 1986; Edmunds 2001; Hinds 1998).

The conclusion briefly suggests some further implications of this study of silence in Catullus.

1

Natural and Sociocultural Silence in C. 6

... nothing is able to keep these things quiet.

6.12: *nam nil ista ualet nihil tacere*

In this chapter I aim to give a first impression of what we stand to gain by reading poems for their silences. In particular I wish to illustrate the basic difference, discussed in the introduction, between natural and sociocultural silences: between what *cannot* be said, or what goes unsaid in fact, and what *may not* or *should not* be said but—for otherwise there is no purpose to a prohibition against speaking—*could be, can be* spoken. My main example is c. 6, (“Flavius, about your girlfriend to Catullus”; *Flavi, delicias tuas Catullo*).

Taken as a first example of Catullus’s poetry, c. 6 presents certain complications. It has seemed to some readers shocking, vulgar, or obscene in subject matter and diction.¹ Catullus asks about the details of a friend’s morning-after bedroom; since the friend does not open up, Catullus happily infers. In his own poetic speech he does not mince words. C. 6’s main complication would seem to be, then, that it violates propriety or decorum. Whether this is indeed a difficulty is perhaps a matter of taste: can one admire “the silk purse” or see only “the sow’s ear”?²

For just this reason, however, c. 6 is important for our purposes. The poem concerns itself with the difference between *what is said* and *what is kept silent*. We will see how c. 6 is founded on an interest in just such modalities of speech: is or is not, may or may not, can, cannot, must not. From this perspective any shock to c. 6’s topic and language is

precisely in how, on a sequential reading of the corpus, it says outright what earlier poems have kept relatively silent: sexual details are spoken aloud in so many words. A particular point of contrast in this connection is with the bracketing cc. 5 ("Let us live, my Lesbia, and let us love"; *Viuiamus, mea Lesbia, atque amemus*) and 7 ("You ask how many of your giant kisses"; *Quaeris quot mihi basiationes*). Both have been dearly loved by readers of Catullus for, we may say, their rather less overtly sexual images of erotic passion. In their context, and in their terms, c. 6 can indeed seem coarse.³

But to read c. 6 mainly in terms of those poems, as an *unacceptable* violation of linguistic taboo, is I think to misread it.⁴ As we will see, Catullus delights in the poetic possibilities of just such self-consciously outrageous violation. I therefore seek to read c. 6 in its own terms, as they constitute the poem's self-conception and help to constitute as well Catullus's poetics. To that end I also discuss certain ironies and evaluative terms given programmatic status in the corpus by the *libellus's* dedication, c. 1 ("To whom do I give this charming new booklet?"; *Cui dono lepidum nouum libellum*). With attention paid to its interest in modalities of speech and silence, as well other sense perceptions, c. 6 may thus be read as a powerful and artful examination of silence, whether natural or sociocultural.

Sounds Deferred, Desired, and Absent: Silence in C. 6

Questions of taste or decorum notwithstanding, we might best begin, then, with a logically prior question: Is there really silence—of any kind: natural or sociocultural—in a poem, especially one from so speechy a poet, one purporting to represent his speech directly?

At first glance, c. 6 seems to be full of sounds indeed. These are of different types, but special attention would seem to be paid to vocal sound. From beginning to end there is ordinary speech, shouting, ordinary speech again, and a summons to the heavens. What does it mean to overhear these and likewise to experience the poem's other sense-perceptual actions? Through them, may we overhear silence in a meaningful way?

Flavius, about your girlfriend to Catullus,
if she weren't uncharming and inelegant,

you would tell and wouldn't be able to keep quiet.
 But it's some feverish, skinny little whore
 you cherish: that's shameful to admit. 5
 For you're not lying alone at night:
 silent in vain since the bedroom shouts it
 with blossoms, fragrant with Syrian olive oil,
 and the couch rubbed this way and that, here and
 there, and the brandished argument and 10
 the walking-about of the tremulous bed.
 For nothing is able to keep these things quiet.
 Why? You wouldn't parade about your thoroughly
 fucked-out flanks if you weren't up to no good.
 So, whatever you've got, good, bad, 15
 tell me! I want you and your lover:
 to call you both to the heavens in witty poetry.

Flauī, delicias tuas Catullo,
 nī sint illepidae atque inelegantes,
 uelles dicere nec tacere posses.
 uerum nescioquid febriculosi
 scorti diligis: hoc pudet fateri. 5
 nam te non uiduas iacere noctes
 nequiquam tacitum cubile clamat
 sertis ac Syrio fragrans oliuo,
 puluinusque peraeque et hic et ille
 attritus, tremulique quassa lecti 10
 argutatio inambulatioque.
 nam nihil ista ualet, nihil, tacere.
 cur? non tam latera ecfututa pandas
 nī tu quid facias ineptiarum.
 quare, quidquid habes, boni malique, 15
 dic nobis. uolo te ac tuos amores
 ad caelum lepidō uocare uersu.

There seems to be evidence for, even emphasis on, ordinary speech. There is a speaker, identified with the poet himself; an interlocutor, Flavius, who is asked to speak; and a topic for that desired speech, the girlfriend, who is at least potentially an additional interlocutor in her own right. The appearance of all three together in the same, important opening line would seem indeed to emphasize the ordinariness of conversation. "If [Flavius] won't make her available for inspection . . . it must be because he is ashamed of her. C[atullus] demands details."⁵ This would

be in line with the same scholar's observation that Catullus's lyric and elegiac poems acquire much of their charming authenticity by seeming to be conversations overheard.⁶

So far, then, so full of vocal sound and, it would seem, the speech that constitutes conversation.⁷ But all of this may be read differently. First, really only the poet is speaking. Second, what his speech expresses is a desire for somebody else to speak; the implication—as the following lines make explicit—is of course that somebody else could be speaking but is not. Third and finally, the subject of that desired speech, the girlfriend, not only is herself not asked to speak but is not spoken to; for that matter, she is not even named. For all its seeming to emphasize speech in ordinary conversation, the first line, then, is rather suffused with *desire for speech* and therefore with its *absence* or *deferral*. In a word, this seemingly soundful poem is in fact full of silence. If not for the speaker's own utterance, which is in fact an expression of desire for other's speech, nobody would be speaking. Absent other kinds of sounds than the vocal, the poem would convey a perfect silence indeed.

With its first semblance of sound thus problematized, c. 6 warrants an extended second look or, better, a first extended listen: we must seek to overhear a silence that has previously gone overlooked. I do not mean for such a statement to seem merely clever. From the sensorial anthropological perspective advanced in the introduction, it is essential that we scrutinize conventional metaphors for understanding literature that have come from the language of sense perception. In modern scholarship these are above all metaphors of "seeing"; as such they may have worked to privilege language, especially written language, over silence.⁸ I argue that c. 6 is aware of its possible, opposite reading in a meaningful way, in how it figures such desire, absence, and silence as sketched earlier. Mutatis mutandis, that poetics of silence, alongside a more generally sense-perceptual poetics, is present in other important poems. C. 6 thus serves as a useful second example, after c. 55, of certain of Catullus's interests in and approaches to silence.

From this perspective, c. 6's seemingly simple show of sound turns out to be a complex peep show in which the performing poet maintains a witty, self-ironizing distance from potential interlocutors who are kept silent. In a way, it is the poet who imposes silence on them. Any silence in c. 6 is therefore not natural, as if the poem has accurately transcribed an acoustic fact, but sociocultural: potential speakers are constructed as silent in the fictions of poetic discourse. Emphasis thus returns to the poet as speaking subject and as perceiving being. His rela-

tion to the silence of Flavius and his girlfriend—he describes it, desires it, in a way causes it—is the center around which the poem turns. In this connection the speaker himself is also turned on: poetically activated, he is likewise sexually aroused . . . but, as we will see, much or all of this may be a matter of his own poetic imagination. By following him to his poem's extraordinary summons to the heavens, we may conclude that he goes beyond the inappropriate sexual detail that is, in Catullus's poetics, appropriate to witty metapoetry. Ultimately he touches on serious issues in the metaphysics of poetry.

Desire for Speech as Artful Silence

The points sketched here depend on close reading, on close listening to how c. 6 moves, as noted, from ordinary speech through shouting to ordinary speech again and, in the end, to an extraordinary summons to the heavens. Central is the witty insight that even the most vivid sense perception is, once entered into a poem, a plastic object of the poetic imagination and readerly reception.⁹ Although, as imagined by Catullus, those sense perceptions are vivid, and the poem itself is not framed—entirely?—as a figment of the imagination, they nonetheless may be said to take a second place to deferral and desire, especially for speech. Flavius does not speak, and so Catullus, desiring to know what has happened, must infer and give voice to it himself. In this way c. 6 may be said to focus on a sociocultural silence, on a relative silence as it is constructed in conversation or discourse. Later we will see how this “witty,” “charming,” or “funny” (*lepidum*) approach, as enhanced by the poem's “elegant” (*elegans*) structure, resonates with—indeed, repeats—those terms as they are central to Catullus's poetics. By attempting to overhear silence, then, we stand, again, to change our image of Catullus's poetics and poetry more generally.

As sketched here, c. 6 opens (vv. 1–3) ironically. What seems to be a setting for ordinary speech, a conversation between two speakers, turns out instead to be a complex staging of the only actual speaker's ostensible desire for speech on the part of another, potential interlocutor. The silence in which the speaker finds or places himself is at first implicit and then explicit: “Flavius, your girlfriend to Catullus, / if she weren't uncharming and inelegant, / you would tell about, and wouldn't be able to keep quiet” (*Flavi, delicias tuas Catullo, / ni sint illepidae atque inelegantes, / uelles dicere nec tacere posses*).

The poet's desire for speech is both emotionally sincere and metapoetically ironized. Clearly Catullus wishes that Flavius were speaking. But the only explicit statement about desire for speech ironizes it *both* by attributing it to someone other than the speaker *and* by making clear that even that displaced desire, much less any speech, is contrary to fact. As v. 3 has it, it is not Catullus but Flavius who *both* "would want to be speaking" (*uelles dicere*) *and* who, as the form of the modal verb (imperfect subjunctive) implies, not only is not speaking but does not even want to, for otherwise he "wouldn't be able to keep quiet" (*nec tacere posses*). As that second, formally identical modal verb, *posses* (also imperfect subjunctive), likewise implies, Flavius is perfectly quiet. Since his silence fulfills the apodosis of the conditional (begun by "if not," *ni*), we are led by the logic of vv. 2–3 to conclude that the "girlfriend" is probably "uncharming and inelegant" indeed. Otherwise, goes the logic, Flavius would share her.

We may also say, however, that Flavius's silence is not so much a matter of his *keeping* perfectly quiet, as if too quiet *for* the historical Catullus's desire for speech, as of him *being kept* too perfectly quiet *by* the fictional "Catullus," the poet as speaking subject. For it is thanks to Flavius's silence that the poet's utterance may occur in the form of this particular poem. The opening of the poem thus draws our attention to how all the poem's literary facts are literally fictions, fashioned by the poet. This of course is the conceit of the "occasional" poem in general, as it seems to document a moment in time. In particular for our purposes, even if the silence here is of a natural type (for one may keep quiet in a real conversation), as a token it is effectively sociocultural, essential to the poem's form and being whether or not it corresponds to fact. Flavius's silence about the girlfriend serves to increase Catullus's desire for stories about her, perhaps—as I will suggest—his desire for her. Catullus cannot stand not to know her in detail, and so, he fantasizes, indulging his poetic imagination. The result is c. 6, in a way clearly "insufficiently chaste" (16.4: *parum pudicum*).

In this way c. 6 serves as a fascinating example of how desire and deferral may be treated as substantial enough to sustain a fiction; by extension it shows how objects of desire may, if needed, simply be imagined by the poet. When the desire is for speech, when speech is deferred, then in a way the true source of the poetic imagination is silence. As we will see, in Catullus such desire for conversation often, as here, effectively symbolizes desire for more intimate contact; linguistic silence is thus a symbol for physical absence. The kind of desired intimacy varies;

in this case I would say that it is sexual.¹⁰ I do not think, however, that Catullus's *impudicitia* here renders him or his poem truly "obscene." As we will see, Catullus himself wants us to read his poetry otherwise, expressly at several points including c. 5, where "rumors we should reckon as worth only a penny" are attributed to excessively "severe old men" (vv. 2–3: *rumoresque senum seueriorum / omnes unius aestimemus assis*), and c. 16, whose prudish clods would benefit from Catullus's witty scurrility (vv. 10–11: *his pilosis / qui duros nequeunt mouere lumbos*).¹¹ We may say briefly that c. 6 thinks more highly of its own witty indelicacy than that, valuing positively the kind of poetry it embodies as well as the sensual poet whose body, more than any other character's, is most strongly present.

We return to these themes later. What matters at this moment is that the poem expects ironically attentive readers to recognize and likewise attribute high value to those shifts among speech, desire for speech, and silence, and therefore into flights of exquisitely solitary poetic imagination. Anticipating those arguments, in the meantime we may say that witty irony about desire for speech is central to c. 6's self-conception as well as its conception of poetry. This is confirmed by how the opening three lines and their ideas are recalled and transformed by the closing three (vv. 15–17): "So, whatever you've got, good, bad, / tell me! I want you and your lover: / to call you both to the heavens in witty poetry" (*quare, quidquid habes boni malique / dic nobis! uolo te ac tuos amores / ad caelum lepido uocare uersu*).

The final two lines especially further the poem's image of desired speech by containing at least three witty literary ironies. First, v. 16 has the poet coyly "want[ing]" only "you and your girlfriend." In the poem's pragmatic context this refers to Flavius and his girlfriend. Grammatically, however, its construction is ambiguous, such that the lone reader may construe Catullus's "you" as referring to himself or herself, and "love affairs" likewise as his or her own. It is as if Catullus is not content, or perhaps not truly concerned, with Flavius's story in particular but wants to eavesdrop on love affairs more generally, as if he has got a taste for the poetic possibilities of a potential interlocutor's silence. This may be emphasized by how Flavius and the girlfriend are virtually unspecified. Notwithstanding the fact that one is male and the other female, for the poet's imaginative purposes they could be—indeed, are better as—just anybody, even nobody. Such a lack of specificity liberates the poetic imagination from attachment to any sense-perceptible body, leaving only the poet's own.

Second, v. 16 also seems to pun on a word suggesting “silence.” When the line is scanned, *te* and *ac* must of course “elide,” that is, count as only one syllable; otherwise the line would contain twelve syllables, one too many for the meter. It seems likeliest that in antiquity such so-called elision was in fact accomplished mainly not by deletion of the first vowel involved, the usual method employed by most modern readers of Latin poetry, but by synaloepha, a combination of the vowel sounds. But elision as such does seem to have been the general rule for monosyllables like *te*.¹² I would therefore suggest that one impression given here, as a result of the elision of *te* with *ac*, is *tac*. In a line beginning with the short imperative *dic*, to my ear *tac* sounds like a ready colloquialism for the imperative *tace*. It is as if the poet is quietly commanding Flavius—or, to continue the literary irony, the metrically learned reader—to “be silent.”¹³ This would be consonant with the suggestion, on the one hand, that no matter what has been said already, a speech of higher value still is about to be spoken by the poet. This of course is of a piece with the final line’s precision of “promised verse.”

On the other hand, however, the last two lines together also render the poet’s desire for speech ironic. For the speaker’s desire “to call you both to the heavens in witty [or charming] poetry” is in a witty way already fulfilled by the poem itself. In this third and final literary irony, the silence that, according to the poem’s fiction, has yet to be broken has been broken already by the very fact of the poem.¹⁴ We should emphasize that Catullus’s loaded descriptive term, “charming” or “witty,” applies to *desired* or *imagined* poetry. As a result, “wit” evidently may consist precisely in additional deferral or even silence. The poem would not be so inelegant as to praise itself openly, and therefore elegantly reserves its praise for a future poem . . . but c. 6 is, again, that poem already.

This final irony may suggest an overarching shift in the poem. By simultaneously predicting the future and bringing it about, c. 6 seems to move from merely witty metapoetry to implying a possibly more consequential metaphysics of poetry contingent on a poetics of silence. We will consider this possibility in greater detail poem by poem. In any case, we have here a clear example of the poem’s, and Catullus’s, interest in modalities of speech, as what *can* be said overlaps with what *will*, as both are proposed to take the place of what *is not* said otherwise. What remains to be seen is how, for Catullus, “charm” or “wit” consists in saying what *is not* said not because it *cannot* be but because it *may not* be. In his view, as illustrated by c. 6, *may not be* can be tantamount to *should be*. This deep interest in modalities of speech, as they relate to

natural and sociocultural silences, I take to be a crucial characteristic of Catullus's poetry.

Silent "Shouts": Synaesthetic Sense Perceptions and the Poetic Imagination

We have seen how parallels between c. 6's opening (vv. 1–3) and closing (vv. 15–17) lines inform and structure the poem by desire for speech, by speech deferred, and thus by a kind of silence. We may say, then, that c. 6 shows a deep interest in silence both as a linguistic fact (i.e., as something that precedes and structures utterance) and as a literary theme (i.e., as a substantial topic for consideration in its own right). Similar interests will be evident in other poems. But of course not everything is silence or even utterance. To illustrate how Catullus's interest in silence is expressed alongside, and through, other interests, we may now trace c. 6's development by focusing on its vivid sense-perceptual descriptions. Having seen Catullus's interest in relationships among modalities, we might not be surprised to discover here a sort of synaesthesia, "the transposition of sensory images or sensory attributes from one modality to another."¹⁵ Even when potential interlocutors are silent, other signs may yet communicate and, so, speak in a metaphorical sense. Insofar as this depends on, and exercises, the poetic imagination, sense perception thus draws attention back to the figure of the poet himself as lone speaker.

As that speaker, the poet takes advantage of a surrounding silence—simultaneously frustrating and liberating—to develop a series of vivid sense-perceptual images. These are organized around what seems at first to be an unremarkable synaesthesia: in the poem's central sense-perceptual shift, although the speaker's potential interlocutors are silent, there is nonetheless a sort of "shout" (*clamat*). This shout is, however, synaesthetic: it is not vocal or even aural but raised by the scents of flowers and perfume and especially by the mussed appearance of the morning-after bedroom.¹⁶

For you're not lying alone at night:
 silent in vain since the bedroom shouts it
 with blossoms, fragrant with Syrian olive oil,
 and the couch rubbed this way and that, here and
 there, and the brandished argument and
 the walking-about of the tremulous bed.

nam te non uiduas iacere noctes
 nequiquam tacitum cubile clamat
 sertis ac Syrio fragrans oliuo,
 puluinusque peraeque et hic et ille
 attritus, tremulique quassa lecti
 argutatio inambulatioque.

10

In the Latin the climactic, synaesthetic image is produced with a remarkable compression: “you’re not lying alone at night—you’re silent in vain since the bedroom shouts it” is, more literally, “that you—silent in vain—are not lying empty nights, your bedroom shouts,” or “that you are not lying empty nights, your vainly silent bedroom shouts!” (v. 6–7: *nam te non uiduas iacere noctes / nequiquam tacitum cubile clamat!*). V. 7 in particular is perhaps the most concentrated expression of the desire and deferral of speech, the silence, that underlies the poem: oh vainly silent object of strictly silent bedroom’s metaphorical shouting!¹⁷

Flavius works to keep silent, or would trust his “secret” to the silent bedroom. But this is to no avail, since, as it were, “these walls can talk”: aural, visual, and olfactory perceptions all come together to register on the ears. In the context of an interest in silence, this seemingly ordinary synaesthesia is thus remarkable indeed, for it is precisely as if Flavius’s bedroom and, as we will see, his body offer modes of “speech” that make up for absent utterance, silence, as such. Indeed they evidently constitute a kind of action worthy of poetic commemoration. In this connection, we may note that the poem’s synaesthetic shout contains, in the Latin *clamat*, the same root found in the *kleos* of “undying fame.” Etymologically, at least, it is as if Flavius’s story is worthy of epic memory, while a first suitable poet of sorts has been found not in a person but in the rumpled, scented bed. The very possibility of such a bedroom version of undying fame may serve to undermine the “glory”—the same root again—of poetry’s traditional goal of immortality in culture.¹⁸

To return to c. 6’s concrete terms, we may discuss two additional sense perceptions and their associations. Together these serve to emphasize how even a total absence of speech may not mean “silence,” given a wide range of sense perceptions as well as a sufficiently perceptive or imaginative poet. First, Catullus smells the blooms and a foreign perfume. To my ear, the effect of those odors is somewhat ostentatious; perhaps a drawn-out mockery is implied by the awkward jangle of word stress with long syllables in the phrase *Syrio fragrans oliuo* as well as by the jingle of *Syrio . . . oliuo*. In any case, the association in the Roman imaginary between “eastern luxury” and debauched excess is well

established. Excess will return when the poem comes to Flavius's body. In the meantime, these rich odors help to establish how much information is communicated despite silence of language or voice.

Next, in a single turn that combines two senses, Catullus must *see* the mussed bed, but in the poem he records this as somehow *hearing* the bed: he *seems to hear* how it must have sounded while being walked around the room by Flavius's and the girlfriend's activity (vv. 9–11).¹⁹ This combination is, I think, quite important to c. 6's poetics; at the least it figures prominently in its poetic imagination. Greater space (three lines) is given to this auditory image than to the scents that preceded (one line) or to any visual image (indeed, the poem as a whole is hardly visual). That greater space includes the poem's center point (discussed later). It would also seem to be somewhat natural that *hearing* would matter more than *seeing* to an ancient poet, especially in a poem so interested, as we are discovering, in poetry as it may figure speech.²⁰

We may emphasize, however, that while this second, synaesthetic sense perception is highly valued, it is also more obviously a poetic fiction. The *sight* of the bedroom may well be present to the speaker at the moment depicted by the poem; c. 6 is unclear about how intimate Catullus is with Flavius, so as to have access to his bedroom. But the *sound* cannot likewise be present; it can only be a figment of the speaker's poetic imagination. Strictly speaking, the *sound* of the bed being walked around the room is the speaker's present-time reconstruction of a past sense-perceptible action. Moreover, that reconstruction, however plausible, may or may not correspond to something actual, historical, or real. By seeming thus to shimmer between present and past, historical reality and fantasy, this second synaesthetic sense perception draws our attention again to what is most truly at work, namely, an active poetic imagination. In other words, although the speaker seems to focus on imagining what happened in Flavius's bedroom in terms of sense perceptions, the poet takes as much delight simply in the power of his own imagination.

In this way, c. 6's vivid sense perceptions develop an inward focus on the speaker's position or intersubjective experience. Given the poem's dependence on the silence of potential interlocutors, we might suspect that Catullus takes pleasure above all in what he may—must—imagine precisely because it has not been, but yet may be, spoken aloud. Sense perceptions thus serve to emphasize the poet's interest in silence as it interacts with other modalities of speech and so constitutes the very condition of his poetic possibility.

Structural Keys to Thematic Developments

Once past those sense perceptions, vivid but inward oriented, c. 6 develops its inward or abstract orientation further beginning in v. 12. There either “nothing is able to keep these things quiet” or, perhaps less naturally, “keeping these things quiet does nothing at all” (*nam nil ista ualet nihil tacere*). No matter the translation, the line is marked by “for” (*nam*) as a summation of the sense-perceptual evidence that precedes: despite—or due to—Flavius’s silence, perceptive Catullus has at his disposal evidence sufficient to satisfy what seem to be his solitary desires. Although Catullus has a concrete reason in mind “why” (*cur*) Flavius’s keeping quiet is pointless, discussed later in this chapter, the abstraction of v. 12 is presented as virtually an explanation in itself. Indeed, a sort of gnomic force may be emphasized by v. 12 being complete in itself, that is, the only line in c. 6 occupied by and defining a complete sentence. (Otherwise in c. 6 there is either end-stopping, but always after enjambment, or sentences shorter than the line.)

The position of “for” at the beginning of v. 12 also serves to delineate a second ring structure in the poem; along with the first such structure (the opening and the closing) this suggests, if not narrative development, then a forward and upward motion of theme toward a kind of climax. Attention is drawn from desired speech and therefore silence through sense perception and so back to the perceptive poet’s voluble imagination. The *nam* beginning v. 12 corresponds to a first explanatory *nam* starting v. 6, rounding out an internal ring. As a result, the poem may be read as consisting of three sections of five verses, seven verses, and five verses, each marking a stage in the thematic development.²¹ The fact that both “load-bearing” lines, v. 6 and v. 12, are marked as summations or explanations for their preceding sections, respectively vv. 1–5 and vv. 6–11, gives the poem a sense of logical development, with each successive section building on what precedes. There is also an upward motion, with the second *nam* sentence elevating the narrator’s concrete observations of external sense perceptions to, I would say, a more abstract and inward principle about desired speech, silence, articulate signs, and the poetic imagination.

These developments are emphasized by an additional correspondence. Containing and expanding on the outermost ring (vv. 1–3, vv. 15–17), there is a thematic correspondence between two five-line sections (vv. 1–5, vv. 13–17), a correspondence whose precise chiasmic

order (A B C, C B A) gives additional meaning to the poem's elegant ring structures. The first section, vv. 1–5, begins with (A) metapoetic terminology ("uncharming, inelegant"; *illepidae, inelegantes*, terms made programmatic by the dedicatory c. 1, discussed later), then raises (B) the question of desired speech and actual silence ("you'd want to speak and couldn't keep quiet"; *uelles dicere nec tacere posses*), before finishing with (C) vulgarity or verbal impropriety ("feverish, skinny little whore"; *febriculosi / scorti*) that is sudden in the immediate context within the poem as well as perhaps shocking on a first, linear reading of the collection as currently arranged. Reversing that order and so completing the chiasm, the last section, vv. 13–17, begins with (C) the poem's most sexually explicit description (Flavius's "thoroughly fucked-out flanks"; *tam latera ecfututa*), then modulates (B) *desired* speech into a *command* for speech given to the desiring subject ("tell me!"; *dic nobis*), and finishes with (A) a statement of poetic intent in, again, critical terminology marked as important to Catullan or "neoteric" poetics ("I want to call [you both] to the heavens in witty poetry"; *ad caelum lepido uocare uersu*). These elegant structures (frame of vv. 1–3 and vv. 15–17; a central section, vv. 6–12, marked off from equal sections, vv. 1–5 and 12–17, by summary *nam* sentences, v. 6 and v. 12) emphasize the thematic development I have identified earlier.

Desire and Envy: Flavius's Bed as Concrete Limit to Catullus's Abstract Imaginings

As we have seen, at the center of it all, in the central section of vv. 6–12, attention is drawn to how the presently speaking subject knows of a past story worthy of telling because of evidence that is present in part only imaginatively and that is audible, legible, only synaesthetically. As Catullus puts it, flowers (visual), perfume (olfactory), and bedroom (visual) all "shout" (*clamat*). This action is aural but not vocal, much less linguistic. In a strange way, then, the silence that pervades the poem, an absence of ordinary conversation, is not completely broken. Only the poet speaks and so draws attention to his solitary status.

C. 6's odd-numbered total of seventeen lines, however, means that there is a literal center, and the poem's ring structures should allow us to treat it as a center of attention. From this perspective the poem encircles not its self-impressed speaker but the impossibly, imaginatively

perambulated bed: “the bed all about, here and there” (v. 9: *puluinusque peraeque et hic et ille*). In this connection Wray suggests further that the bed, and thus the poet’s intimate access to Flavius’s bedroom, is central to the sequence of cc. 5, 6, 7. Although this is mathematically inexact—c. 5 has thirteen verses, while c. 7 has twelve, such that the total in the sequence is forty-two verses, without a *single* central line—it is thematically suggestive. For at the exact center of that sequence are 6.8–9: not just the bed but also the “blossoms and Syrian olive oil” with which the bedroom is fragrant.

Not only c. 6 on its own, then, but the sequence of cc. 5, 6, 7 is centered exactly around what we have seen is c. 6’s high point of synaesthetic sense perception, indeed the very moment when all such “perception” is revealed to be a matter—and a sign—of the poet’s imagination.²² In this way the sequence would seem to emphasize how, really, only the poet’s activity breaks silence in something like a literal way. For the perceived items’ contributions to the room’s collective shout are of course metaphorical: the flowers are seen and smelled; the perfume is presumably only smelled. Even the piece that comes closest to sound, the “noisy” bed, is “noisy” distantly, in its case only in the past and so, again, only thanks to the speaker’s imaginative reconstruction.

There is, however, much to be made of the bed or bedroom as setting and sign for intimacy and poetic activity. Here I note only how such a setting serves to inspire and focus the speaker’s imaginative activity by implying—or allowing him to infer—bodies in intimate interactions while also, in a way, requiring their absence. As in c. 6, so for example in cc. 68(a) and 50 does a bed help to suggest a combination of unmediated intimacy with the fact that poetry, like all discourse, mediates experience and therefore depends on distance or deferral. In this way, poetry representing intimacy might in fact be said to figure a sort of “physical silence”; in particular there is such a silence, a lack of communication, between the speaking subject and the spoken object as they are bodies separated by time and space.

Thus in c. 68(a), Catullus’s addressee is imagined awake and “alone in his celibate bed” (v. 6: *desertum in lecto caelibe*), whence he requests some sexy poetry. Catullus claims that he is unable to comply because of his own experience of a more grievous physical silence, caused by his brother’s recent death.²³ Although the emotions are of course very different, this part of c. 68(a) has the same literary irony as the end of c. 6: Catullus fashions a poem out of (multiple) desire(s) for speech,

thus strictly out of silence, and so draws attention to the relationship between utterance, in the form of poetry, and silence.

Similarly in c. 50, a speaker is afflicted with desire for intimacy and/as it may be signaled by poetry: Catullus himself pines for a fellow lover of poetry, Calvus, with whom he spent the previous day composing poems.²⁴ As a result, the bed Catullus occupies, now on his own, is again a setting and symbol for dissatisfying distance and so for vivid desire for conversation.²⁵ The bed thus coincides with and suggests (undesirable) silence. As in cc. 6 and 68(a), then, it is from desire for speech, from what is strictly a kind of silence, that there may come poetry: "after my limbs were stretched out, exhausted from the labor, half-dead on this little bed, I made this poem for you, my sweet" (vv. 14–16: *at defessa labore membra postquam / semimortua lectulo iacebant / hoc, iucunde, tibi poema feci*).

By extension, silence is also the starting point of utterance. The bed or bedroom, by definition a natural sign—an index—of physical and emotional intimacy, is thus also made into a concrete cultural symbol for the abstract desire for speech that, in its turn, is simultaneous with silence. Symbolized in particular is the fact that the speaker is intimate with his or her subject at best only historically: since even occasional poetry is at best earlier speech in a later transcription, the present moment of a poetic utterance is marked by relative silence. As a result, any poeticized intimacy is, as we have seen, in a way strictly fictional.

From this perspective, it matters that the bed in c. 6 is not the speaker's. Although Catullus seems to have—or imagines—a kind of personal access to Flavius's bedroom, he also seems thereby to feel more intensely excluded from intimacy. For Flavius's silence is both a valuable starting point for the poem and a kind of end point for the poet: Catullus may go as far as he wishes in reconstructing his friend's intimate encounter, but no matter how far he goes he remains in his own imagination. Although, as we have seen, Catullus takes great pleasure in his imaginative power, we might wonder whether he speaks so vividly out of a combination of desire and envy. As c. 6 says outright, he wants "you and your lover" (v. 16: *uolo te ac tuos amores*).²⁶

We may think, then, of Catullus truly wanting not his own imagination or even Flavius's story but precisely the sex Flavius has evidently had. Catullus wants his own walls to talk and, as we will soon consider, his own sides to register his sexual activity, a badge of pride (v. 13: *tam latera ecfututa*). Such desire would be emphasized by the inanimate

bedroom and bed getting what the superanimated poet does not. Exhibiting the symptoms traditional to lovers in Hellenistic epigram, the bed is sick with Catullus's fever for his own *febriculosum scortum*.²⁷

"You wouldn't parade about . . . if you weren't up to no good"

C. 6's sense-perceptual descriptions are "charming" or "witty" in part for their amusingly aggrieved tone, but they also suggest something more serious. As they constantly recede from the speaker's present experience into memory, requiring recitation for their own vivification, they suggest how speech, even poetic speech, recedes into silence. The noisy bed is thus a freighted symbol indeed, of desire for conversation as well as other intimate interaction, in short for meaningful exchange. Insofar as those things are matters of the past, the present is characterized negatively by desire, absence, silence. We are therefore drawn to the flipside of Flavius's silence: poetically liberating for the poet, the silence is simultaneously frustrating for the person.

In c. 6's heavily sexualized context, the person may perhaps be implied to experience, at best, a belated orgasm but clearly does not experience the intimacy that is so vividly desired. In any case, we may say for certain that a poem's speaker is, in a way, prevented by the poem's own mediation from achieving unmediated intimacy. In other words, the silence out of which the poet speaks seems also to be waiting for him to finish; and the silence that follows will drain his words of their meaning, diminishing further any connection. We will see how this inevitability of silence is treated more fully and seriously in certain poems.

In the meantime, we note that the person's desire for, and exclusion from, intimacy is emphasized somewhat differently in c. 6 by a final piece of sense-perceptual evidence: Flavius's "thoroughly fucked-out flanks," which he would not be "parad[ing] about if [he] weren't up to no good" (vv. 13–14: *non tam latera ecfututa pandas, / ni tu quid facias ineptiarum*).²⁸ In some contrast to what has been discussed so far, this final piece of evidence seems to be visual. There is perhaps a case to be made for the tactile, depending on how we construe "parade about" (*pandas*) and what we make of Catullus's implied access to Flavius. In any case, this moment is a large part of what has caused c. 6 to be considered vulgar or obscene. Certainly it would seem to stand out on a first, linear reading of the poems. But how might we read or hear this moment differently, with a developing image of poetics of silence in mind?

The vulgarity of the phrase *latera ecfututa* may seem to lower the standards of what is, as we have seen, an elegant poem; Flavius's sides may seem a sow's ear indeed. But vulgarity is consonant with what we have also seen is a prevailing interest in modalities of speech: above all, what *can* be said, linguistically, is distinguished from what *may not* be said according to social or cultural tradition. In this way vulgarity is part of Catullus's interest in silence: the verbal adjective *ecfututa* is valuable, "charming" or "witty" or simply poetic, precisely as an example of the sort of thing that ordinarily goes unsaid. For Catullus in certain poems, the combination of "*can*" and "*may not* be said" is tantamount to *must*. As we will see him detail in c. 16, one way in which poems are valuable is if they are precisely "insufficiently chaste" (v. 8: *parum pudicum*). The speaker of c. 6 thus takes a real, unironic pleasure in giving voice to something otherwise kept quiet.

At the same time, however, the vulgarity helps to emphasize a fundamental irony or paradox of poetry. This is the way in which a poem, as an utterance ideally repeated over time, implicitly records a perpetual silence (i.e., of the original author) and requests its own continual re-admission into speech (i.e., by the current speaker or reader). Utterance and silence thus interact with each other in poetry. This interaction is the more intense, even intimate, in the close, cunabular space of a poem like c. 6, in which the bodies of (potential) interlocutors are brought into various kinds of contact.²⁹ Modalities of speech, including silence, and what we might call "modalities of bodies," including distance and absence, interact with one another, emphasizing and signifying one another.

As we have seen, this interaction consists most overtly in attention to sense-perceptible objects including others' bodies: most obviously, of course, Flavius's and the girlfriend's, about whom just a bit more later in this discussion. But insofar as these persons and things are, in various ways, marked as remote from the speaker, a powerful, implicit focus is on that speaker, the poet himself. Just as his imagination is activated in response to others' silence, so too might we say that his body is involved. At the least, he wants it to be, and that desire helps to constitute the poem: as the speaker fills up the silence with, among other things, his interest in others' bodies, he draws attention to his own. Quietly but unmistakably, the poet figures himself as both subject and object of desire, liberated in being able to speak such desire aloud, frustrated in remaining consigned to a kind of exclusion.

In this way, part of the complex pleasure taken by the poet in c. 6, part of the purpose of its vulgarity, is to show how "charming verse"

can indeed be turned around topics traditionally considered inappropriate: things traditionally kept silent or better left unsaid. C. 6's self-consciously outrageous suggestion, in the forms of subject matter and diction, is that, for Catullus in certain poems, it is a good thing to be "up to no good." Even if—especially if—you will not say why, there is a charming poet to say it for you. The pleasure is, then, precisely in violating traditional linguistic taboos, perhaps alongside certain other traditional constraints, so as to create innovative art and possibly to provoke new interactions. In this connection we may understand the speaker as implicitly aligning himself with his potential interlocutors. He desires not only to see but to have his own Flavian *latera ecfututa*, and not only to hear about but, I would say, to have sex with the girlfriend precisely insofar as she is a *febriculosum scortum*. These desires are indeed vulgar, and their manner of expression here perhaps obscene. Such outrageousness is precisely what makes them attractive to the speaker and valuable to the poet.

Silent Interlocutors and the Écouteristic Poet

The poet's own capacity for outrageous speech comes, as we have seen, out of the actual silence of his potential interlocutors. By way of rounding out our discussion of c. 6's silences as such, then, we may note first that, outside this poem, Flavius is unknown; even inside the poem he is hardly specified: his name is an adjective for "blond." Perhaps more precisely, he is unknown *before* the poem, which then offers an image of him silenced, which, in turn, his actual silence *afterward* cannot alter. It is not clear what we may make of this. Is that prosopographical silence accidental, in that more about Flavius simply has not been preserved? Or is it deliberate on Catullus's part, with, as it were, a name changed to protect the identities of those involved? But elsewhere the poet has no trouble teasing and skewering real people.

I do not know whether we can decide. But to me it is evocative that a poem depicting so charged and intentional a relationship between language and silence is itself an utterance that breaks an otherwise total silence about its main character . . . at the expense, in the event, of his own purposeful silence at a particular occasion. Flavius may or may not have a girlfriend, depending on whether we think Catullus's good-natured teasing is based in fact, but there is no doubt that he has silence of some kind or another.

Paradoxically, through his silence Flavius acquires what Catullus proposes, “undying fame.” He is supposed to share that immortality in culture with the girlfriend. But her own silence in, or silencing by, the poem is if anything more complete than his. As noted, although strictly speaking she is, as a character, a potential interlocutor, in c. 6 she is not addressed or even named. The fact that the speaker seems not to concern himself with such an absolute silence of the girl or woman is telling. For while Catullus may want both boyfriend and girlfriend, or to poeticize both, he is expressly interested—or feigns interest—here only in getting it from Flavius. Thanks to Flavius’s keeping quiet, Catullus must content himself with hearing it from the ineffectually silent room. By contrast, he imagines not a peep from the girlfriend.

Nor is there really any peep at her. In a poem replete with sense-perceptual description, it is striking that she is described in terms that are mostly abstract, if emotional (*delicias, amores*), and indefinite (*nescio quid, quidquid habes*). Indeed, none of those terms even requires that she is a “she,” although *deliciae* may imply it. Her most vivid description, as *febriculosum scortum*, does fairly require a woman, but of course then the poem’s only woman would be a low-class prostitute.³⁰ This would raise serious questions about gendered and sexualized silence, including outrageous—and, to Catullus, therefore humorous—sexual violence; these are discussed further in chapters 2 and 6.

But even those issues are abstracted away from any concrete “her.” The phrasing makes the girlfriend’s being in the poem a matter of Flavius’s desire for her: his “delight” (*diligis*) makes her an “object of delight” (*delicias*), connoting sexual activity perhaps above all. And Flavius’s desire is figured in turn through the poet’s desire for speech and, therefore, his own delight in how, again, an unspoken, indefinite state of affairs lets the poet speak fantastically freely. In this complex of silence, the girlfriend becomes a fairly insignificant third party to what may or may not be her story.

This would indeed be a matter for a study of the poem’s genderings if not for the fact that, as we have seen, the poet is not really interested, either, in what the male Flavius has to say. Catullus seems more interested in his own desires, especially for utterance, and his own capacities to meet them. Again, then, c. 6 depends on and delights in silence. As Flavius’s relative silence allows Catullus to feel both frustrated (he says he wants another to speak freely) and liberated (failing that, he may speak more freely himself), so does the girlfriend’s absolute silence—it is close to nonexistence—give him the barest outlines of an image that

he may, as it were, fill up with himself. In this way, desirous deferral of speech, delight in silence, reaches a metapoetic climax in the poet's affection for his own *febriculosum scortum*, in the form of this "not uncharming or inelegant" poem.

When, then, at the end of the poem the poet references the heavens, it is as if to put on airs or burst his own hot-air balloon. C. 6's particular version of "undying fame" paradoxically consists not in the poem's perpetual speech but in the silence, even the absence, of everyone but the poet. As a result, what is truly commemorated or given immortality in culture is the poet's own pleasure in himself. We may therefore say that c. 6 is best described—and likewise describes the best poetry, whose wit is most conducive to cultural immortality—as a performance that is solitary but not therefore necessarily silent or unheard.³¹ What *may* be said in response to others' silence? In c. 6, the answer is poetry, good poetry exemplified by a kind of peep show conducive to solitary pleasures. The poet loves how it feels, and the poem how *it* feels (as a poem), and readers are encouraged, if not precisely to watch (we have seen that c. 6 is hardly visual), then certainly to overhear.

Toward a Poetics of Silence in Catullus: C. 6 with Cc. 5 and 7

We have been closely reading c. 6 with an ear to its silences. This kind of "close listening," involving as it does the critical imagination, might be thought too subjective or particular to a given poem.³² We might then ask: What is such a reading worth in somewhat more objective terms? How might it be applied to other poems, individually and in combination?

We may begin by acknowledging that, of course, we need not share Catullus's appreciation for overhearing vulgarity or obscene detail, what we might call—on the analogy of voyeurism—his *écouterism*. Whether c. 6's outrageous manner is a pleasure or a problem may, again, be a matter of taste. (In chapter 2 we will consider certain moments when Catullus himself seems to draw a line, and in later chapters we will turn to other sorts of poems than the self-consciously outrageous.) Taste notwithstanding, appreciation of c. 6's image of good poetry may change our understanding of the poems with which it interacts.

In particular, c. 6's metapoetry is framed in the social-performative terms established as programmatic by the *libellus*'s dedication, c. 1. With this in mind we may correct a critical imbalance that seems to have been

caused by readers' preference for the bracketing cc. 5 and 7, in contrast to which c. 6 has been, I would say, valued unfairly low and in the context of which read somewhat incorrectly. We may also therefore clarify certain aspects of cc. 5 and 7 in light of c. 6. All of this will serve as a first example of how reading for silence allows us meaningfully to reread, if not the corpus as a whole, then certain important poems as they interact with one another in terms of a poetics of silence.

A clear formulation of the situation affecting c. 6 is offered by Wray: c. 6 "is somewhere at the opposite end of the spectrum of valuation [from 5 and 7], excluded not only from critical discussion of the kiss poems but from the memory of many readers."³³ One problem, then, is that c. 6 has to a degree been read as if it were exactly and only what cc. 5 and 7 would seek to ward off: the sort of rumor-mongering expected of excessively "severe old men" and so worth "only a penny" (5.2–3: *rumoresque senum seueriorum / omnes unius aestimemus assis*). Some examples of this evaluation of c. 6 in the scholarship were noted in this chapter's introduction. To take another example here, Thomson, in his influential edition of Catullus's complete poems, writes about c. 6 that "this occasional piece removes us temporarily from all deeper and more personal feeling."³⁴ Thomson must mean that "deeper and more personal feeling," having previously been established at least by c. 5 if not also by some or all of cc. 1–4, is "temporarily" lost in c. 6 and then happily recovered in c. 7.

This seems to me at least to mischaracterize c. 6, which, as I have sought to show, is "personal" indeed, centering around an intense evocation of the poet's subjectivity. Moreover, while the question of whether the poet's feelings are more or less "deep" may perhaps be an undecidable matter of opinion, it seems that such comparisons of c. 6 to cc. 5 and 7 are not so much judgments on the former in itself as they are ways of expressing preference for the latter two. A problem, again, is that cc. 5 and 7 supply not only a context but what seems to be a natural contrast, beloved as they are for their countless kisses and for their beautiful equation of "love" that is thus unlimited with inevitably limited "life."³⁵

There are of course ways in which c. 6 is enriched by being read in a sequence with cc. 5 and 7. Here, too, Wray offers a clear formulation: the three poems constitute a "triplet . . . a remarkably coherent and satisfying mime in miniature on the aggressive power of evil eyes and wicked tongues."³⁶ But even in such a context it is not clear that c. 6 is most persuasively read as a *negative* exemplar, exemplifying *unironically* what

cc. 5 and 7 devalue. Wray, whose reading of c. 6 is strongly recuperative, nonetheless calls c. 6 a “stern, severely moralizing public exposure.”³⁷ This is to impose on c. 6 the language of c. 5: if Catullus and Lesbia are to “value all the rumors of severe old men as worth only a penny,” then we might well feel that c. 6 comes cheap, consisting as it does of the poet’s own imaginative rumormongering at the expense of lovers (5.2–3, quoted earlier).

As we have seen, however, c. 6’s speaking subject takes far too much delight in his outrageous poetry for his activity to be rightly described as “severely moralizing.” As I hope to have made plausible, moreover, to stop with such a contextualizing reading, one that clearly prefers cc. 5 and 7, is to mistake c. 6 by not considering, first, how the poem proceeds as a thing in itself and in its own terms.³⁸ Such a reading procedure, I think, would earn Catullus’s impatient laughter (per c. 5: “at the very least, acknowledge that your readings have not been very valuable”) if not attract his more violent scorn (per c. 16: “I’ll give you something to be quiet about”).³⁹ Taking c. 6 seriously means responding to the poem as something intended to be appalling only *ironically*, and *therefore sincerely* appealing.⁴⁰

What It Means to Be “Charming” or “Witty”: Metapoetry in C. 6 and C. 1

Part of what needs to be done, then, is to let c. 6 stand on its own and in its own terms. We may think of this as aligning the poem more strongly with its speaking subject, the poet who tells a better story out of his own solitary imagination than he could have if actually informed by his potential interlocutor. In its own terms, we might also think of c. 6 as a sort of *febriculosum scortum* indeed: traditionally devalued but clearly worth something in Catullus’s poetics (and, for that matter, in his view as well as other sense perceptions). For even that throwaway woman is said to be “cherished” (v. 5: *diligis*), valued positively indeed, by the man who could be telling her story. I have suggested that she is also desired by the vividly sense-perceptual poet. In a poem based, as we have seen, on desire this, too, would be positive. Just as the poet “wants to call [her] to the heavens,” *febriculosum scortum* though she be, in “charming verse,” so does this outrageous poem intend itself to be received positively.

In this connection we may return to the conditional with which Catullus begins his investigation of Flavius’s love affair: “if she weren’t

uncharming and inelegant, / you would tell and wouldn't be able to keep quiet" (*ni sint illepidae atque inelegantes, / uelles dicere nec tacere posses*). The speaker speculates that his addressee is keeping quiet only because his love affair is so low class. Run logically backward, and with the girlfriend standing in for the poem, this condition means that, because the poet is not silent, the poem is proved to be "charming and elegant," for otherwise he would not be speaking it aloud. This possibility seems strengthened by the final line, where as we have seen the "witty poetry" is both eagerly anticipated and, ironically, already realized as c. 6 itself. Again, then, the speaker wants only what he has already got; in traditional terms it may indeed be worthless, but in the poem's own evaluation it is worth a great deal. A frustrating and liberating silence, the chance therefore to give his poetic imagination free rein, the poem as *febriculosum scortum*, perhaps a low-class affair as such: these are what the poet desires and, so, marks as "charming" and "elegant."

"Charming" and "elegant," *lepidum* and *elegans* are, along with their negatives as in c. 6, critical evaluative terms for Catullus, appearing frequently throughout the corpus to describe poems as well as people.⁴¹ "Charming" (*lepidus*) appears thus with programmatic force in the first line of the very first poem, where either a scroll containing some or all of the "polymetric" poems or, perhaps less likely, a collection of the entire corpus is referred to as a "charming new booklet" (1.1: *lepidum nouum libellum*). The "charm" is linked to the booklet's physical polish: its pages are "freshly smoothed with a dry pumice stone," signifying both artistry and novelty (v. 2: *arida modo pumice expositum*). But the "charm" also consists in the abstract implication of that concrete image: the poems' small scale ("booklet," *libellum*, is the diminutive of "book," *liber*) allows for fine and detailed craftsmanship, in line with Catullus's preferred Callimachean poetics.⁴² With such refined poetry not to everyone's taste, the first poem goes on to dedicate the booklet to a reader known already for his sympathy to Catullus's "trifles." This is Cornelius, who "thought that [Catullus's] trifles are something" (vv. 3–4: *Corneli, tibi, namque tu solebas / meas esse aliquid putare nugas*).⁴³

But Catullus complicates any simple image of readerly sympathy here by imagining a "model reader" who will appreciate a poem for its irony, including witty self-ironization.⁴⁴ Cornelius's sympathy for Catullus's poetry may be a thing of the past: he "used to think" or "once thought" (*solebas . . . putare*) that Catullus's "trifles are something." This could mean that he no longer thinks so.⁴⁵ This first possibility would get us a joke at the poet's expense: Catullus is represented as

being characteristically unlucky in long-term relationships, whether loverly or writerly. Thus c. 1 trucks in uncertainties: “something” or “whatever” three times in ten lines, each in a different form (*aliquid*, *quidquid*, *qualecumque*); the opening question of who is the dedicatee; the concluding coyness about the unnamed “patron virgin” (*patrona uirgo*). Since c. 1 is programmatic, the *libellus* as a whole proceeds under that sign of witty uncertainty.

A second possibility is that Catullus figures himself as having turned from “trifles” to a “booklet” that is, in contrast, poetically more important. A related, and equally ambiguous, contrast is with Cornelius’s work, exemplified here in the form of a “daring explication of all of history in three volumes: learned, by Jupiter, and laborious!” (vv. 5–7: *ausus es unus Italorum / omne aeuum tribus explicare cartis / doctis, Iuppiter, et laboriosis!*). As readers have noted, this would seem to recall Callimachus’s dictum that “a big book is a big evil.” Catullus’s “booklet” would thus be valued for its small size and elegance in contrast perhaps to the scale and bulk of Cornelius’s history. Both works are learned, but Catullus’s seems to wear its learning more lightly and, therefore, elegantly. This is hard to decide, and we (moderns) must be careful not to impose our own, anachronistic sense of what passes for “light” wearing of learning, or of what indeed was “laborious” to ancient readers of literature.⁴⁶

In any case, we may say that when c. 1 enjoins Cornelius to “take this booklet, whatever it is” (v. 8: *quare habe tibi quidquid hoc libelli*), the request is inflected by many witty ironies, including self-ironization and, as we have been seeing, a sense of what poetry may—should—be.⁴⁷ In this metapoetic connection, we do well to remember that self-deprecatory humor, insults, vulgarity, and obscenity may all serve to signal a sense of solidarity and even compliment among friends. We discuss this further in chapter 3. In the meantime, we may say that speaker and addressee(s) are closely linked by a poem’s sparkingly familiar tone. Part of the charm of Catullus’s poetry is a capacity for just such effervescent intimacy. To mix metaphors, the feeling he often achieves is of close associates drinking each other in with just enough grains of salt—there is an intensity to the experience, to be sure, but it is not always, or even often, grimly serious.⁴⁸ It is worth noting in this connection that *lepidus*, which I have rendered so far mainly as “charming,” can also mean “funny.”⁴⁹ As we have seen in c. 6 and now c. 1, Catullus thus values readers who know how to take things appropriately seriously, that is, with some irony about (self-)presentation, with learning

worn lightly, and with a positive valuation of vulgarity as a delightfully innovative sort of “figured speech.”⁵⁰

With all of this in mind, we may see more clearly how c. 6 is of a piece with the *libellus*’s poetics of “charm,” and in turn how this relates to an interest in silence. Even if the poem is a *febriculosum scortum*, the sort of thing considered out of place in traditional poetry, it is clearly intended to be valued precisely for how it causes delight as an outrageous innovation. As a final point of comparison in this chapter, a useful parallel is provided by c. 10. There Catullus fails to impress a friend’s girlfriend, who, as a result, is in his view “a little bitch” (v. 3: *scortillum, ut mihi tum repente uisum est*). Similarly, when she catches Catullus in a lie, he says that she acted “as befits a cocksucker” (v. 24: *ut decuit cinaediorum*).⁵¹ In part, however, these descriptions serve as ironic and delightfully outrageous ways of suggesting Catullus’s attraction: with what I take to be ostentatiously exaggerated reservation, he admits that the woman is “not totally charmless or unsexy” (vv. 3–4: *non sane illepidum neque inuenustum*). Vulgarity, indeed obscenity, serves to express a complex frustration: Catullus has not shown up the girl and therefore impressed his friend, but he also has not impressed the girl. The joke is on Catullus, and he clearly expected his readers to get it. When he crosses a linguistic boundary, then, we may say that it is to signal a kind of solidarity with readers who are expected to enjoy the transgression. In this way, in c. 10 as our main example of c. 6, Catullus is “charming” and “witty” when saying aloud outrageously what is otherwise, traditionally, kept silent.⁵²

Nam nil ista ualet nihil tacere: Some First Conclusions about a Poetics of Silence in Catullus

In itself, and as it figures desire for speech, silence stimulates and tantalizes the poetic imagination. The effect is simultaneously frustrating and liberating. As we have seen, in c. 6 Flavius and his girlfriend are silent, and so the speaking poet ironically desires: his desire is a result of their silence, or enhanced by it, and he would not have it, them, or—as I think we are led to conclude—himself any other way. To the speaking poet, there is a way in which potential interlocutors are poetically valuable precisely insofar as they do not actually speak. Whether they keep or are kept silent, they thus serve to give an especially delectable shape to silence. The poet is given the chance to say and to do whatever he wants; others’ silence is the very condition of his utterance’s possibility,

preceding and surrounding it. Per the poem's concluding joke, then, what the poet desires is in fact what he has already got: his poem, of course; at a deeper metapoetic level, the very opportunity to utter his poetry; and at another level, uncertainly lower or higher, himself.

From this perspective, even the most concretely sense-perceptual act of the poetic imagination tends toward poetry as abstraction, solitary pleasure, solipsism.⁵³ At the furthest extreme, poetry may consist entirely of the poet's solitary imaginative activity. And yet it somehow lays claim to immortality in culture: as promised at the end of c. 6 to Flavius and his girlfriend, that "undying fame" is—as a result of constant deferral of speech, constant silence—reserved in fact for the one who speaks, the poet himself. In other poems, as we will see, Catullus engages more seriously with the question of whether this situation is to be valued. His exploration in c. 6 is intense, and personal, in a very different way. What does it mean when a poet can achieve a kind of immortality in culture, by definition public and by tradition "appropriate," through an outrageous poetic fantasy, of a sort to be identified certainly with voyeurism or *écouterism* and perhaps with private sexual pleasure?

SILENCE, WIT, SHAME, AND JOUISSANCE

The question reminds us that, for Catullus, part of a poem's interest is in how it manages modalities of speech, including silence, to highlight and to cross certain linguistic and social or cultural boundaries. By investing in the difference between what *may* or *may not* be said, a "charming" or "witty" poem says aloud what is, traditionally, only transgressively overheard. Catullus's desire for, and desire to poeticize, what *can* be said aloud, a linguistic possibility, but *may not* be said, a traditional constraint, places many of his poems in the shifting space between natural and sociocultural silences.

Our first main example, c. 6, is thus grounded in the fact that not just anything *can* or *may* or *should* equally be spoken. In a sort of hierarchy of interest, in c. 6 these modalities correspond to natural, sociocultural, and what we might call poeticized silence. Some things, like having taken a *febriculosum scortum* for a lover, are "shameful to admit" (v. 5: *hoc pudet fateri*) but cannot by any means be kept quiet (v. 12: *nam nil ista ualet nihil tacere*). It should be clear, however, that for Catullus any such "shame," *pudicitia*, is a source of delight. More generally, the fact that such things cannot be kept quiet is of the essence for "charming" or "witty" poetry: silence is, again, poetry's very condition of possibility.

Catullus thus figures himself as a better teller of the story than Flavius could be precisely insofar as he can say aloud a story that has been kept silent. As a character, the speaker must, and lustily does, *respond* to his potential interlocutors' silence. But as the master of all the characters, including any figuration of himself, the poet is more strictly *responsible* for the silences. So much the better if this involves giving synaesthetic "voice" to inarticulate objects: this is a powerful sign that, absent the perceptive and imaginative speaking poet, nothing would sound.

The result is a sort of joyful expression out of silence, the poem itself as a *jouissance* indeed.⁵⁴ As we have seen, it is intended to be valued; to borrow the term Catullus uses of Flavius's feeling for his girlfriend, c. 6 is to be "cherished" (v. 5: *diligis*). But does it go further than "delight" and, as its own concluding lines seem to suggest, generate a sort of "vulgar sublime"—not, as usual, beyond human capacity but rather beyond the bounds of propriety or decorum?⁵⁵ Is it therefore worthy, as Flavius and his girlfriend may or may not be, of poetry's claim to immortality in culture? Should we grant to something that *may not* be said the being-said-forever that is "undying fame"?

POETICS OF SILENCE AND SOCIAL PERFORMANCE

These are questions only poems can answer, since only the poem speaks.⁵⁶ As a result, only the poem may truly create what we have noted are its own necessary silences, before and during its utterance: a part of what poetry "does" or "makes" (as per its Greek etymology) is *itself*. As we have seen in considering c. 6, for a poem to make itself as an utterance means for it to enter into a relationship with silence. As will emerge in our discussion of other poems, this metaphysical irony means that what purports to be a transcript—of an ordinary conversation "overheard"—is both prescriptive, including directions for its reading, and proscriptive, calling for the necessary silence of other utterances, including other poems.⁵⁷

In my view, Catullus's attention to this metaphysical irony of poetry is one of his most intentional and meaningful literary-artistic acts. As I read certain poems, Catullus takes the fact of language's dependence on silence, a simple inevitability, and makes it a central feature of literature. He therefore develops a poetics of silence. And he does this beautifully: the poetry is not only very smart; it is also very good.

But all is not only high-concept or high art, as if the poetry were "art for art's sake." Catullus's poetics of silence is significant in part because of how silence and utterance together—how discourse—provided

important spaces for social performance in late Roman Republican culture. In the introduction, I suggested that, in general, it is clear that Catullus's poems are interested in speakers' social positions and, especially, in the constant repositioning of speaking subjects via the full range of discursive and otherwise semiotic modes employed by elite Roman culture.

We see this operative in c. 6 by a sort of contrast: what the speaker seems to want spoken is another person's story, but by speaking it himself he rather advances his own performance. In the chapters that follow, we will see a wide range of effects produced in a poetics of silence: strictly poetic or artistic, more deeply thematic, more generally social and cultural. Ultimately, concrete sociocultural questions and concerns will be matched by more abstract, even philosophical interests. We will then see Catullus confront the fact that there are indeed silences beyond the sociocultural, over which even the sophisticated poet has no control, and so out of which even poetry seems unable to manage any meaningful speech.

2

Orality and Sexualized Silence in Cc. 5, 7, 74, 80, 88, 116, and 16

Whoever tells such stories keeps more quiet.

Martial 12.35: *quisquis narrat talia plura tacet*

In the first chapter, an approach to reading Catullus with an ear to his silences was exemplified mainly by c. 6. With silence taking its place among various modalities of speech, c. 6's self-consciously outrageous violation of traditional linguistic taboo—it *does* say what one *can* say but, traditionally, *may not* say—served as a partial definition of what is, for Catullus, “charming” or “witty” in poetry. As we extend our reading to poems representing a wider range of types, we will expect to encounter both natural and sociocultural silences of various kinds. We will likewise see these responded to, and evaluated, by Catullus and his characters in various, indeed divergent ways. Like the poems themselves, Catullus's poetics of silence is complex.

A first natural step toward that complexity is to consider poems that, like c. 6, consist in outrageous utterance of things that might ordinarily go unsaid in more traditional poetries or in public discourse. This stepwise approach allows us to develop incrementally a clearer image of how that tantalizing combination of “*can* be said” and “*may not* be spoken” is, at certain moments, tantamount to “*must* be spoken aloud”: violation of linguistic taboos is virtually an obligation for the innovative poet. In this chapter, then, my main examples are certain poems interested in those silences that involve orality, the physical

involvement of the mouth in things other than speech, and above all oral sexuality.

These poems form a natural thematic grouping because of how certain sexual activities involve the mouth and thus interfere with articulate speech by precluding it (although speech is possible, another activity is preferred) or occluding it (speech is blocked completely). Since, as discussed in the introduction, “articulate speech” is more or less the ancient definition of “human language,” such oral activities and their sexualized silences involve transgressions not only of linguistic boundaries but also of lines separating human from other, generally lower, orders of being. Just as c. 6 allowed us to raise some serious questions, so too will certain other poems on sexual topics thus serve to get us closer to Catullus’s engagement with other consequential aspects of silence.

By way of transition I begin with further consideration of the triplet constituted by cc. 5, 6, and 7, focusing on how an ear to silence helps us to hear cc. 5 and 7 especially for their charged oralities. Our task is to hear cc. 5 and 7 as “kiss poems,” indeed, interested in orality as a source of vivid imagery and as a figure for poetry. I then turn to a group of poems—cc. 74, 80, 88, and 116—all of which insult a certain Gellius for what Catullus alleges are truly perverse sexual activities. This group of poems helps us to understand more clearly how Catullus figures oral sex in particular as involving silence. Since oral sex by physical definition precludes or occludes speech, it imposes a kind of silence; moreover, since oral sex is charged in late Republican Roman culture with anxieties about masculinity, femininity, and power, it is a potent symbol for the politics of performance in society as well as in poetry.

Sexualized silence is thus closely linked, in Catullus’s poetics as in other Roman literature, to public discourse. As I will argue Catullus puts it punningly in Latin, there is a link established between *rumor*, “rumor,” and *irrumatio*, “enforced fellatio.” All of this is given its perhaps most vivid, single expression in c. 16. As my final example in this chapter, then, c. 16 will serve to put a fine point on the links among orality, oral sexuality, sexualized silence, and the rumormongering or gossip that formed an important part of public discourse. As perhaps the single best expression in antiquity of the difference between historical poet and his poetic persona, the “biographical fallacy,” c. 16 will also help us to draw together certain metapoetic threads and thus to transition to a focus in chapter 3 on silence, metapoetry, and the society of poets.

Given these poems’ subject matter, versions of the difficulties that pertained to our encounter with c. 6 may also apply in this chapter. We will see that in certain poems Catullus in fact goes further than he did

even in c. 6 to value not only sexualities in general but images of sexual violence in particular. We might say that this represents a natural or logical extension of how he defines good poetry, in part, as speaking outrageously: the greater the outrage, the better the poetry. C. 16, for one, seems to say this outright. And we should also acknowledge that, again, such violations of linguistic taboos and sociocultural constraint may indeed be valued positively as symbols of solidarity within social circles; in this way obscenity is a kind of “coin of the realm,” marking tokens as valuable for exchange among friends and peers. Such social value of poetry is explored more fully in chapter 3. In the meantime, however, we should expect that some of what Catullus values may be provocative, disturbing, or disgusting to us. This is, again, in some ways a matter of individual taste, but it also stands to reveal important differences between Catullus’s literary culture and our own.

Cc. 5, 6, and 7: “Triplet” or “Threesome”?

As discussed in chapter 1, if the present arrangement of the poems is accepted, c. 6’s vulgarity is the collection’s first explicit obscenity. Preceding poems, however, do seem to refer to sexuality, if more obliquely. An interesting example is provided by the pair of c. 2 (“Sparrow, my girlfriend’s delight”; *passer, deliciae meae puellae*) and c. 3 (“Grieve, you Venuses and Cupids”; *lugete, o Veneres Cupidinesque*). Both refer to a small bird, a *passer*, evidently kept as a pet by Catullus’s girlfriend, conventionally called a “sparrow.”¹ In c. 2 the bird is the object of Catullus’s envy, for it represents such a source of delight for the girlfriend as he himself would wish to be. In c. 3 the bird has recently died, and the poem describes both its journey to the underworld and the girlfriend’s grief in terms that are, I would say, comically mock-serious. Although the bird thus clearly symbolizes aspects of Catullus’s relationship with his girlfriend, there is no reason to doubt that the *passer* is “in fact,” as on the surface of the poems, a bird.

It has been shown, however, that *passer* may plausibly be read as a slang term for “penis.” At a deeper level, then, the bird would symbolize particularly sexual aspects of Catullus’s relationship.² Without wishing to push this reading too far, we may yet wonder whether c. 2 could thus be understood as suggesting some sexual biting, perhaps in oral sex: the girlfriend “likes to provoke sharp bites” (v. 4: *acris solet incitare morsus*). Likewise, c. 3’s image of the bird deceased (v. 3: *passer mortuus est meae puellae*) and “walking along a shadowy walk” (v. 11:

nunc it per iter tenebricosum), in a way haltingly, might suggest a specific change in the relationship, perhaps a faded—or “limping”—libido. As the sources I have noted indicate, there is insufficient evidence to decide completely the question of *passer*’s potential double meanings. But certainly there is sexuality at work in these poems. In both the bird is described as “my girlfriend’s delight” (2.1, 3.4: *deliciae meae puellae*), with “delight,” *deliciae*, connoting particularly sexual endearment, precisely as we saw earlier in c. 6. And the bird’s death is to be mourned by “Venus and Cupids” (3.1: *Veneres Cupidinesque*), the archetypal figures of sexuality and desire.³ As a result the *passer*’s “double entendre” seems plausible indeed, if again undecidable.⁴

We may wonder whether a sly ambiguity is in fact Catullus’s purpose at this early point in the *libellus*, especially if we read these earliest poems as quietly preparing the reader for the louder shock of c. 6. If c. 6’s more explicit sexual speech is prepared for in other, earlier poems, this would suggest ways of reading them. Might we take Catullus’s gleeful voicing of the sexual story behind Flavius’s silence, his synaesthetic “shout,” as a guide for overhearing other poems? Do any seemingly innocent poems in particular contain quiet, kept-silent allusions to orality, oral sexuality in particular, or sexuality in general?

If so, then we might consider the group of cc. 5, 6, and 7 less a “triplet”—connoting simultaneous conception and birth—than a “threesome”: this term might better capture the poems’ complex interactions. Although I do not discount the differences among them, I argue that cc. 5, 6, and 7 have much in common when considered from the perspective of Catullus’s poetics of silence. As Wray puts it, “Poem 6 is inhabited . . . by the same themes and concerns as Poems 5 and 7.” I would put this in reverse as we seek to overhear how cc. 5 and 7 quietly give voice to themes that c. 6 voices, too, only more loudly. In particular I hear in those “kiss poems” an expression of interest in sexualized silence as it relates to orality. This would be in line with what Richlin describes as Catullus’s “focus on the mouths of his beloved and his enemies.”⁵ As a poetic figure, such sexualized, particularly oral silence helps Catullus to develop a sort of metapoetry in which sexual and poetic activities, both charged social performances, are understood to overlap in the semipublic space between appropriate and inappropriate behaviors.

C. 5 AND C. 7 AS “KISS POEMS”

5. Let us live, my Lesbia, and let us love,
and let us value the rumors of severe old men

as all worth only a penny.
Suns may set and rise again;
but we, once that brief light has set, 5
must sleep one everlasting night.
Give me a thousand kisses, then a hundred,
then another thousand, then a second hundred,
then yet another thousand, then a hundred;
then, when we shall have made many thousands, 10
we'll jumble them up, so that we won't know,
and so that no evil man can give us the eye
when he knows that there are so many kisses.

5. Viuamus, mea Lesbia, atque amemus,
rumoresque senum seueriorum
omnes unius aestimemus assis!
soles occidere et redire possunt;
nobis, cum semel occidit brevis lux, 5
nox est perpetua una dormienda.
da mi basia mille, deinde centum,
dein mille altera, dein secunda centum,
deinde usque altera mille, deinde centum;
dein, cum milia multa fecerimus, 10
conturbabimus illa, ne sciamus,
aut ne quis malus inuidere possit
cum tantum sciat esse basiorum.

7. You ask how many of your giant kisses,
Lesbia, are sufficient and excessive for me.
As great the amount of Libyan sand
lies at silphium-bearing Cyrene
between the oracle of torrid Jove and 5
the sacred sepulchre of ancient Battus,
or as many stars, when the night is silent,
see furtive love affairs of men;
thus for you to kiss many kisses
is sufficient and excessive for mad Catullus, 10
which neither the curious may count
nor the evil tongue hex.

7. Quaeris quot mihi basiationes
tuae, Lesbia, sint satis superque.
quam magnus numerus Libyssae harenae
lasarpiciferis iacet Cyrenis
oraclum Iouis inter aestuosi 5

et Batti ueteris sacrum sepulcrum,
aut quam sidera multa, cum tacet nox,
furtiuos hominum uident amores;
tam te basia multa basiare
uesano satis et super Catullo est,
quae nec pernumerare curiosi
possint nec mala fascinare lingua.

10

Cc. 5 and 7 are expressly interested in who can know what, who has heard what, and who might speak about it publicly.⁶ As the threesome progresses, c. 6 might thus be said to effect a transition between the bracketing poems' significantly different images of a clandestine lover's fears; having read c. 6 for its silences, we may therefore seek to overhear similar modalities of speech in its bracketing poems. It has long been noted that an important aspect of both c. 5 and c. 7 is a fear of what undesirable speech might bring. To put it briefly, too-precise accounting in language allows for further language to do harm, in the forms of "envy" (literally "the evil eye," *inuidia*, c. 5) and "malicious speech" including "spell casting" (*mala fascinare lingua*, 7.12).⁷ The object of fear is public speech or discourse of the sort that constitutes reputation—whether admirable or shameful—by means of rumor. The threesome thus operates, as do other poems, in what Catullus's contemporary Cicero called "a viciously gossipy city" (*tam maledica ciuitas*; *Cael.* 38).

There are differences between the two bracketing poems. In c. 5, although there is disdain for the "rumors of severe old men," that is, for the gossip that suffuses society, the speaker's fear is not of gossip as such but of the evil eye (v. 12). C. 5 focuses here on what happens when something already specified among lovers is known to an undesirable person.⁸ The fear in c. 7 is the same only in general: too precise a knowledge of the number of kisses could lead to a kind of magic practiced by the wrong sort of person. In particular, however, c. 7 replaces c. 5's implicitly "evil eye," *inuidia*, with an explicitly "evil tongue," *mala lingua*, which could "hex in speech," *fascinare* (v. 12).⁹ As I read the threesome, this replacement of c. 5's "evil eye" by c. 7's "evil tongue" and "hexing speech" is anticipated by c. 6's perceptive, invasive, only mock-invidious interest in silence. As sexual behavior among lovers is discussed more openly, it becomes clearer that silence is indeed a poetic issue.

In this connection, we may emphasize that cc. 5 and 7 together exemplify sexuality as kissing, that is, an oral activity that by definition, by location and action, serves to preclude or occlude speech. Sexuality is

therefore related to silence; indeed, it is figured as a cause of silence, and the silence thus caused is considered especially open to investigation in poetry. Even here there are, again, significant differences between the poems. In c. 5, it is the speaker who desires kisses ("Give me a thousand kisses" etc.; v. 7ff.: *da mi basia mille*) and fears their number, if counted, working against him and his lover (vv. 12–13).¹⁰ By contrast, in c. 7 the addressee is said to wonder about the same speaker's desire, "ask[ing] how many giant kisses . . . are sufficient and excessive" (vv. 1–2: *quaeris quot mihi basiationes / tuae, Lesbia, sint satis superque*), while the speaker answers in the hope of warding off any enumeration or consequent malicious speech (vv. 11–12).¹¹

Those differences aside, both c. 5 and c. 7 are indeed "kiss poems." In both, a desire for oral sexual activity leads to preclusion or occlusion of speech. In c. 5 this is signaled by the very number of kisses: "thousand" and "hundred" are conventional for "uncountably high numbers," and here of course Catullus piles them up. By implication, then, the numbers outstrip capacity for speech. After the fact, moreover, the numbers are explicitly "jumbled up" so as to be (even more) uncountable. Even the lovers themselves will ideally be ignorant (v. 11: *ne sciamus*) of the true numbers of kisses. That shared ignorance represents a culmination in modulation of speech from request (via jussive subjunctives in vv. 1–3) through command (imperatives in vv. 7–9) to more confident or at least ebullient assertion about the future (future tenses in vv. 10 and 11). In this way c. 5 moves consistently toward fantasy about the future, which as we have seen in c. 6 may serve as a subject for voluble poetry indeed but is properly a kind of deferral that comes out of present silence. In c. 5, then, a sort of sexualized silence, a joyful inarticulacy of speech caused by kissing, is valued for how it conduces to fantastically unlimited expression; indeed it is valued more highly than at least one sort of articulate speech, the "rumors of severe old men, to be valued at only a penny" (vv. 2–3: *rumoresque senum seueriorum / omnes unius aestimemus assis*). The lovers' own more valuable, indeed meaningful, activity is a contrastive kind of silent pantomime, staged against a threadbare backdrop of meaninglessly noisy rumor.

Although c. 7 furthers c. 5's theme of uncountability, it suggests preclusion and occlusion of speech less directly. C. 7's indirection is of a piece with Callimachean allusiveness but should also be understood as developing further the image of fantastically tantalizing silence we have seen now in both c. 5 and c. 6. In c. 7, the "sufficient" number of kisses is likened to two things impossible to count, grains of sand and

stars. In addition to suggesting uncountability and therefore ineffability, as concrete objects these provide a somewhat comic contrast between their own visually small size and the *basiationes*, whose morphology, extending past that of a usual word for “kisses,” *basia*, I take as suggesting an exaggeration; I render it “giant kisses.” Silence is therefore implied in part because, in a way somewhat literally, the potential speaker as actual kisser cannot get a word in edgewise.

C. 7 involves silence in two other ways. First and quite explicitly, the uncountably many stars “see furtive love-affairs when the night is silent” (vv. 7–8: *cum tacet nox / furtiuos hominum uident amores*). In the context of the threesome, this silence is as if in continuation or realization of the speechlessness of the lovers predicted at the end of c. 5. There is also here something of c. 6’s sense-perceptual approach: parallel to ostensibly private expressions that are pleasurably overheard, c. 7’s silence provides a background for sight despite—or delighting in—the minor paradox of night vision.¹² Second and more subtly, an interest in silence is signaled by the location of the other uncountable object, grains of “Libyan sand”: these are located “between the oracle of torrid Jove and the sacred sepulchre of ancient Battus” (v. 3 and vv. 5–6: *Libyssae harenae; oraculum Iouis inter aestuosi / et Batti ueteris sacrum sepulcrum*). The oracle “speaks for” Jove (*ora-clum* is related, e.g., to *ora-tor*, “public speaker”), but the tomb is doubly devoid of speech. As a tomb it evokes the absolute silence of death, such that c. 7’s silent night shades more darkly toward the final sleep evoked by 5.5–6; its “sacred” status may imply a ritual silence, as in the phrase *fauete linguis*, “aid the ritual with your [silenced] tongues.” Moreover, as the tomb of Battus in particular, it has a special claim on quiet, for this Battus was famous for his stutter and lisp (he was ἰσχύφωνος καὶ τραυλός; Hdt. 155.4).¹³

These forms of silence, ranging from uncountability and resultant ineffability to silence as such, emphasize the speaker’s concluding interest in warding off “hexing by malicious tongues.” In the context of kisses, it is intriguing that this hexing, clearly an oral activity, seems to have a sexual connotation of its own. As Fitzgerald notes, “the word *fascinum*, meaning “evil spell,” came to be a common word for penis because of the efficacy of representations of this part of the body against jealous emanations.”¹⁴ C. 7 may thus conclude with Catullus’s hope that Lesbia’s kisses are sufficient in number, and perhaps in size, to preclude the possibility of unwanted fellatio, whether performed by Lesbia on another man or perhaps imposed on Catullus.¹⁵ The threesome of cc. 5,

6, and 7 could thus be read as concluding with an implicit link strongly established among orality, oral sexuality, and power.

CC. 5, 6, 7 AND SILENCE

It is not clear whether *fascinare* should call to mind fellatio here. In any case, however, cc. 5 and 7 with their unsayable numbers of kisses, rumormongering old men, furtive lovers overheard, silent nights, oracles and stutterers, and the pervasive implication that all of this tends toward the darkness and silence of death, are clearly interested indeed in orality, speech, and sexualized silence. That interest is more meaningful for the poems' relationship to c. 6, which as we have seen has much to do with silence. Most importantly, as Catullus has it the poems' activities cannot be kept completely silent: "for nothing is able to keep these things quiet," as we have seen c. 6 put it (v. 12: *nam nil ista ualet nihil tacere*), and thankfully, since "Venus takes pleasure in wordy talk" . . . at least so long as the poet may overhear or otherwise take part (55.20 and 22: *uerbosa gaudet Venus loquela* and *dum uestri sim particeps amoris*).

Taken together, then, the threesome figures close relationships among oral interaction, solitary speech, and conversation, and concern about how one is spoken of. It is worth emphasizing that these and other poems take place in a world of powerful speech and, as we are seeing, significant silence. Cicero's "viciously gossipy society" (*tam maledica ciuitas*; *Cael.* 38) is exemplified vividly here, not only relatively seriously (as in the clandestine lover's fear of being found out and exposed in speech) but also "wittily," as Catullus defines it: with an eye (and other sensory organs) on the charged relationships among orality, oral sexuality, and sexualized silence. In addition to kissing, we have seen emerge the particular possibility of a poetic interest in fellatio. We return to that particular oral sexual activity and its silences later, first in the group of poems pillorying Gellius and then in c. 16.

In the meantime, we may say that in the form of c. 7, these three poems certainly conclude with a contrast between what the mouth and its tongue might best do, that is, kiss or otherwise please orally, and what it does worst, that is, malign. While a sexual oral activity like kissing precludes or occludes speech, causing a sort of inarticulacy, this is yet more desirable and valuable than articulate speech, which has been, in the poet's view, more truly perverted, put to use in worthless rumormongering and "bad, hexing speech." In this way sexualized silence is valued despite how it physically impedes articulate speech, virtually the

definition of human language. As we saw specifically of c. 6, now we may say somewhat more generally that (breaking) suggestive silence is, again, a characteristic of “charming” or “witty” poetry. By contrast, explicit rumormongering seems rather tedious, a holdover of traditional public discourse, old-fashioned or even cliché in Catullus’s ears.

Irrumatio and *Rumor*: Figuring Oral Sex and Silence

Any simple contrast between desirable silence and undesirable speech is complicated, however, by what we have seen is Catullus’s own interest in outrageous speech, explicit or implicit violations of linguistic taboos precisely about sexuality. In later chapters we will see that Catullus’s interest in silence is not limited to such topics. In the meantime, we may sharpen our sense of Catullus’s interest in sexualized silence by considering, first, the possibility of a slender pun in his Latin. This pun will serve as a heuristic to link cc. 5, 6, and 7 to poems picking up rather more explicitly on the relationship between oral sexual activity and silence (as noted, in this chapter mainly cc. 74, 80, 116, and 16). From there we may advance to poems interested in silences that come out of less specifically sexual, more generally interpersonal and social interactions (cc. 22 and 36, in chapter 3).

The possible pun is between “rumor,” *rum-or* (as explicitly at 5.2, implicitly as the whole of c. 6), and “forcible imposition of fellatio,” *ir-rum-atio* (as explicitly and implicitly in poems to be discussed later). I have called this possibility slender because, strictly speaking, the two roots show different vowel quantities: a long syllable in *rum-or*, a short syllable in *ir-rum-atio*. Nevertheless, it is evocative that these two words are closely linked in Catullus’s poetics of silence: the one denoting a worthless kind of speech, the other an act that is highly valued not only as a physical experience but also as a symbol of how masculinity relates to silence. For of course there is partial or total occlusion of speech when one’s mouth is filled; articulate speech, the hallmark of human language, is rendered especially difficult.

We may say, then, that *irrumatio* allows for *rumor* by imposing silence on certain potential speakers; indeed *irrumatio* would seem to do this more directly and forcibly than kissing. This argument develops further certain arguments made by other scholars about oral sexuality and public performance, including silence, at Rome. Fitzgerald offers a helpful formulation of the situation: “*Irrumatio* in Catullus draws atten-

tion to a potentially aggressive aspect of *poetry itself*, which puts words into people's mouths; it speaks for everybody and everything while all else is silent (or mouthing its words), and it makes its subject matter take on the meanings of a single voice."¹⁶ Likewise, Richlin has earlier observed that "irrumation, logically, forces the victims to be silent as well."¹⁷ Richlin also provides useful historical and cultural context for this observation, focusing on the Roman cultural notion of "the unclean mouth that supposedly results from oral intercourse" (*os impurum*).¹⁸ She is therefore able to suggest further that "it seems probable . . . that at least for Catullus, the foulness of the *os impurum* stems from the contact between mouth and penis as outlet for urine."¹⁹ The general perspective, in which oral sexuality is "polluted," is made clear by Craig Williams, outlining a Roman cultural stigma: "The bias against both women and men who perform fellatio pervading Latin texts is clearly related to the idea that oral-genital contact befouls the mouth."²⁰

Accepting that oral-genital contact was figured as involving pollution, here I focus on how it links poetic and social performance, including performance of gender, by vividly figuring an imposition of sexualized silence. The figure of oral penetration in Catullus is forceful especially in suggesting how the capacity to speak depends on a negative condition, the occlusion of another person's capacity for speech. In this way the speaking poet-as-lover may imagine himself warding off wagging tongues (*mala . . . lingua*) by preventing their full range of motion. Theoretically this should apply as well to female speakers, since cunnilingus could be considered a way of "penetrating" the man performing it.²¹

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Catullus focuses on *irrumatio*.²² *Irrumatio* appears eight times in Catullus, mostly with him as the actual or potential *irrumator*. These are at 10.12–13, where, however, Memmius is *irrumator*; at 16.1 and 14, discussed later; at 21.8 and 13, where Catullus forces himself on Aurelius; at 28.9–10, where Memmius, again, has forced himself on Catullus; at 37.8: Catullus is not to be doubted in his capacity to force himself on two hundred; and at 74.5: Gellius might force himself on his uncle, discussed later.²³ Of these instances of *irrumatio*, perhaps the clearest to suggest a link between forcible imposition of fellatio and silence, and certainly the most consequential for metapoetry including a poetics of silence, is c. 16. To reach that high point of low-seeming speech, I discuss a loose grouping of poems insulting Gellius for what Catullus seems to consider truly perverse sexual activity: cc. 80, 74, 88, and 116.²⁴ Gellius's alleged activities, oral and otherwise, give Catullus

the chance to speak outrageously and thus both to impose and to draw on sexualized silences.

C. 80

Why, Gellius, may I say that those rosy little lips of yours
 have become whiter than winter snow,
 when you leave home in the morning, when the eighth hour
 of a long day kisses you up from soft quiet?
 Certainly there's something. Or does rumor whisper true, 5
 and you are gobbling the giant bulge at the middle of a man?
 This much is certain, shouted by poor little Victor's ruptured
 loins, and by your lips marked with milked-out sperm.

Quid dicam, Gelli, quare rosea ista labella
 hiberna fiant candidiora niue,
 mane domo cum exis et cum te octaua quiete
 e molli longo suscitatur hora die.
 nescio quid certe est: an uere fama susurrat 5
 grandia te medii tenta uorare uiri?
 sic certe est: clamant Victoris rupta miselli
 ilia, et emulso labra notata sero.

C. 80 is quite similar to our first main example of c. 6 in theme and development; the similarity is emphasized by a small but crucial verbal parallel between the two poems.²⁵ As in c. 6, so here the addressee is asked to tell the story of his love affair. Because of the identity of c. 80's addressee, better known than Flavius through this and other poems, and because of the nature of both the activity and the poem's purpose in pointing to it, c. 80 is, I think, more aggressive in tone. C. 80's story is a step past c. 6's in that it has reached beyond "rumor" to the level of "public reputation," *fama*. Thus properly shameful, it serves as better material for a witty version of more traditionally vituperative insult.²⁶ For a poet interested in outrageous speech, the story is as it were too bad to pass up. More important for our purposes, although the story has been kept somewhat quiet, still it is obvious to the perceptive poet. As we will consider in some detail, this is due to a visible sign as well as to a sign that the poet figures as audible but which, in itself, cannot be: it registers as audible in a way that is strictly synaesthetic. Exactly as in c. 6, that synaesthetic sign is a "shout" (*clamant*, the same verb). Again, then, two kinds of silence are both necessary and broken. One is the

frustrating vocal silence of the addressee, whose story the poet is thus liberated to tell. The other is the silence of a properly inaudible sign, which only the poet perceptive to silences may hear. In this way c. 80 lets us overhear Catullus at his outrageous, leering best.

"SHAM LYRICISM" AND SURPRISING VULGARITY

As noted, c. 80 seems to begin somewhat more innocently, with a perfectly perceptible sign that excites the poet's interest: "Why, Gellius, may I say that those rosy little lips of yours / have become whiter than winter snow?" (vv. 1–2; *quid dicam, Gelli, quare rosea ista labella / hiberna fiant candidiora niue*). In the context provided by the poem as a whole, this question is of course rhetorical. Before we continue with the question and c. 80's rhetorical tone, however, we may note in passing how those opening lines are lovely poetry; this will help us to listen to the poem as a coherent whole.

The first two lines develop a complex and delicate interconnection among four or five contrasts: red and white, roses and snow plus spring or summer and winter and therefore passing time, usual and unusual, lesser (in size) and greater (in quality).²⁷ The complexity is clear. Delicacy is achieved in several ways, first in how the colors are suggested by fairly mild metonyms: *rosea* is less florid than, for example, *purpurea* or *sanguinea*; *candidiora* is somewhat abstract, perhaps "shining like a star" or "without blemish," but delimited concretely by *hiberna . . . niue*, "winter snow." Delicacy is also achieved, second, in the elegant, annular word order of v. 2, with its internal rhyme (*hiberna fiant candidiora niue*); third, by the diminutive *labella*, "lovely little lips," with its echo of and implications for Gellius's name: he is somehow "smaller," whether tenderly or, as the poem turns, jokingly, especially in comparison with his outsized lover (Victor's *tenta* are *grandia*); fourth and finally, by a subtle juxtaposition of human (*Gelli*) and natural (floral, seasonal, tempestual) worlds in passing time.

C. 80's first couplet is, then, rather lyrical. Some readers have considered its lyricism a "sham." In addition to the usual fiction of the occasional poem, emphasized here by the question being "merely" rhetorical, this particular occasional poem eventually reveals that the love affair is nothing so delicate as might deserve a lyric treatment. Thomson thus writes that "the language appears artificially exalted and 'poetical,'" and Quinn that the "sham lyricism is undercut by the concluding line of the poem," in which Gellius's lips are revealed to have been whitened by his lover's ejaculation after vigorous fellatio: Gellius's

"lips marked with milked-out sperm" (8: *emulso labra notata sero*).²⁸ This seems indeed a coarse literalization of the traditional "lover's pallor."²⁹

At first glance, in fact, one might say that any lyricism is "undercut" by all of the last four lines, fully the second half of the poem (vv. 5–8). Certainly Gellius's dripping lips are, by public standards, unworthy of the beauty of their opening description. The third and fourth lines make somewhat more explicit the implication of the second, as Catullus voyeuristically imagines Gellius "when [he] leave[s] home in the morning, when the eighth hour of a long day kisses him up from soft quiet" (vv. 3–4: *mane domo cum exis et cum te octava quiete / e molli longo suscitatur hora die*). The image is quiet and, in a double entendre, sexual. There are furtive comings and goings, which may suffice to imply sexual activity. There is the juxtaposition of "soft" (*mollis*)—suggesting flaccidity or effeminacy and, in a male, sexual availability—with "long" (*longo*). And there is a hint of oral activity in *suscitat*. The image is also, again, more "lyrical" than it needs to be, with v. 4 in particular rather grand in its evocation of how human activity relates to cyclical time.³⁰ By contrast, vv. 5–6 get right to the point, such that vv. 7–8 may reveal the true, tawdry cause of Gellius's discoloration. All of this would seem indeed to reduce vv. 1–2's lyrical complexities to mere effect of that more important cause. As a result, delicate beauty is stripped crassly away: Gellius's whitened—really: dripping—lips are reduced to indicating nothing so much as that he has performed fellatio.

GELLIUS'S "SOFT QUIET"

To read the poem only for its punch line, however, would be to miss the joke. We have seen with reference to cc. 5, 6, and 7 that speaking outrageously—violating linguistic taboos, breaking a sort of sociocultural silence—is, for Catullus, one way to achieve "charm" and "wit" in poetry. From that perspective we may say a bit more about the artistry of c. 80 and the significance of its vulgarity in a context of sexualized silence. In particular, by depicting *both* Gellius's visible but inarticulate sign *and* the poet's playacted uncertainty, c. 80 draws attention not only to poetry's capacity to investigate silence but also to poetry's need for silence as the condition of its own possibility. We may thus read c. 80's development not as undercutting a "sham lyricism" but as sharpening a focus on the poet's audible activity. The poem's fiction of Gellius's mouth and tongue being silenced, like Flavius's reticence in c. 6, symbolizes by contrast the poet's more impressive oral and aural skills. From this perspective, c. 80 shows that Catullus need not threaten a

forceful imposition of fellatio in order to be able to enjoy a liberating sexualized silence.³¹

As noted, the question that opens the poem continues into vv. 3–4, specifying Gellius's activity in time: "when you leave home in the morning and when the eighth hour of a long day kisses you up from soft quiet" (*mane domo cum exis et cum te octaua quiete / e molli longo suscitatur hora die?*). The approach remains delicate, displaying a sort of documentarian's affection for his subject even as it shades into a mincing, mocking jibe. There is not much here of concrete detail (Whose "home" or "house" does Gellius leave? What is the force of the "eighth hour" as opposed to others?) and nothing sexually explicit. But Roman readers will have noticed the implication of "soft quiet." *Mollis*, "soft," also means "unmanly," "flaccid," or "effeminate," especially in reference to a man's passive receipt of a sexual advance by a "harder," more aggressive man.³² Gellius's "soft quiet" is thus implied to be a "sexually receptive quiet," out of which silence signals assent or, what amounted to the same thing, a failure to refuse.

Gellius is therefore quiet not occasionally, as if in this instance alone, but characteristically insofar as he is taken to be a plaything for other men. We will see later that such a passively sexual silence is made to characterize Gellius and his extended family also in c. 74, where Gellius silences his uncle by having sex with his aunt.³³ In c. 80, the implication is strengthened by two auditory effects in the Latin. First are the echoes among *molli*, *Gelli*, and *labella*, making Gellius himself sound a little soft, just like his rosy little lips. English strains to replicate the Latin echoes, but something like "Andy, you pansy, what fancy lips you have" might give a similar impression.³⁴ Second, *suscitat hora*, "the hour awakes," looks ahead to the sound of *fama susurrat*, "rumor whispers," and, I think, draws on its meaning to suggest orality; thus I have rendered the hour loosely as "kissing Gellius up." As a result, we may imagine Catullus needling Gellius about the latter's lips as they synaesthetically show, via their change in color, a correlated change in sound. Prevented from speaking, Gellius is silent, while Catullus, who has simultaneously overheard and seen, by contrast is conspicuously still able to speak and, therefore, is still manly.³⁵

On its own, then, c. 80's opening question is full of social-performative evaluation. Gellius is, as it were, dressed inappropriately for polite society and, so, dressed deliciously for Catullus's reconfiguration of innovative *mores* into impolite poetry. In its small spaces and details, the poem quickly moves in parallel from delicacy to vulgarity and from

playacted uncertainty to gleeful, tawdry assurance. The delicate glance of the opening lines thus shades into the poet's artful leer. Just as we readers seem to overhear, so is the speaking subject speaking because he has overheard something about Gellius.

C. 80'S ORALITY, ORAL SEX, AND SEXUALIZED SILENCE:
WHOSE GREATEST PLEASURE?

The poet himself is present in the poem's developing image of orality including speech, oral sex, and sexualized silence.³⁶ For c. 80 is framed as the next link in a chain of oral activity implicating poetry (*quid dicam?* the subjunctive mood suggesting that tantalizing experience of frustration and liberation), rumor or public reputation (*fama*), ordinary conversation (in the fiction of question and answer), whisper (*susurrat* evidently, *suscitat* arguably echoing; with *susurrat* linked by position in its line to the words for "lips" and "quiet" in theirs), and metaphoric or synaesthetic "shouting" (*clamant*).

The same chain also includes silence of at least three kinds: Gellius's whenever he is fellating Victor, that is, in early morning and somewhat later in the day, in all cases *outside* the poem; Gellius's *within* the poem, where he is silenced—in a way just as sexually—by Catullus, who alone speaks and so who is manliest (with even bulging Victor described by a diminutive, *miselli*);³⁷ and Catullus's own silence as he makes his speech a matter of lingering on indefinites, of letting the listener's or reader's imagination run wilder for the lack of specificity.

As structured by this complex chain of oral activity and silence, the poet's disingenuous ignorance and strategic reticence reveal him to be an advanced student of silence indeed. By letting the story play out slowly, by keeping the volume turned down, Catullus seeks to make what is, really, a nonstory into something suspenseful. The poem frustrates an expectation of traditional narrative and thus seeks to liberate us into poetic appreciation of a different kind.

It is, then, with what I take to be great internal coherence that c. 80 ends in overpowering orgasm. Gellius is silenced by it and signed by it. In a way his silence is visible, as his mouth serves a purpose other than answering Catullus's question, and still there are signs speaking volumes. Like Flavius in c. 6, Gellius here is also silenced by the poet, who alone speaks aloud the story that is otherwise told only inarticulately. This is emphasized in c. 80 by the effect of the orgasm on Gellius's other silencer, Victor. As the meaning of his name may suggest, he is ostensibly the "winner" and so in a way expected to be the one telling

the story, even bragging. But with a poetics of silence in mind, we may say that “poor little Victor” gets the worst of it. His loins, having been “broken open,” “shout,” while he himself says nothing (*clamant Victoris rupta miselli / ilia*; vv. 7–8).³⁸ On the one hand, he may have nothing to say or perhaps no need to speak; his masculinity is already attested in traditional “terms” by his irrumation of another, implicitly weaker man.

With silence in mind, however, on the other hand, Victor is, like Gellius, himself unable to speak, silenced in a way that diminishes him relative to the poet (thus he is called *miselli*, “poor little”).³⁹ Like Flavius’s flanks, Victor’s loins are more interesting to the poet than the man himself; and Victor’s mouth is unmarked even as a site for sexualized silence. Not only the fellator but even the irrumator is, then, quieted by the act, or more precisely by the poeticized story of the act. And this is framed in terms that recall another moment of scandalously poetry-worthy sexual activity, when Lesbia is described as “breaking all her lovers’ loins over and over” (11. 19–20: *identidem omnium / ilia rumpens*).⁴⁰

At the end, then, the greatest pleasure is the poet’s, for the poem emphasizes his capacity to speak by enforcing silence in a manner now clearly sexualized and gendered, vividly if ironically performative of masculine identity. As in c. 6, the poet thus describes something else as “shouting out” (*clamare*) the story (Flavius’s bed, Victor’s loins). Importantly, however, those things do not have voices in literal or conventional senses: they shout or speak only because the poet speaks for them. (Victor’s loins are thus likened, by the two poems together, to furniture.) From this perspective, a reading of c. 80’s second half as undercutting its first, of the poem as undercutting itself, does not seem to stand. The poet as storyteller gains a great deal by pretending that he knows less than he does so that it seem to come trickling out. Just as we are told what actually discolours Gellius (the poem ends as it began, a ring of attention to his whitened lips), so are we asked to understand what ideally passes Catullus’s.

HOW TO BE OVERHEARD “KEEPING MORE QUIET”

In the way just described, c. 80, like many metapoetic poems, tells two stories simultaneously, one about the spoken subject, another—perhaps more important—about the speaker, the poet himself. As Catullus’s most direct ancient imitator, Martial, puts it, “whoever tells such stories keeps more quiet” (12.35: *quisquis narrat talia plura tacet*).⁴¹ We may say concretely that Gellius’s silence, although physically accomplished by Victor, is poetically most convenient for Catullus. “What am I to say?”

(v. 1: *quid dicam*) asks the poet who has the answer already and so can stage his knowledge under the guise of conversation. It seems that a witty poet would never be so gauche as to speak out of turn. As we have seen, however, such charming poetic pretense to speech is precisely a space in which the poet is allowed to be louche. Thus Catullus seeks to get away with saying aloud what can, indeed, be spoken but should not be. The result, in Catullus's view at least, is outrageously delightful poetry.

In this connection c. 80 makes more explicit what we have seen already in c. 6 as well as its bracketing cc. 5 and 7: the poet's vested interest in the sort of sociocultural silence imposed on potential speakers by rumor. In c. 80 that sociocultural silence is linked directly to the silence caused by fellatio. "Can it be true what rumor whispers," Catullus asks, "that [Gellius is] gobbling the giant bulge at the middle of a man?" (vv. 5–6: *an uere fama susurrat / grandia te medii tenta uorare uiri?*). If the whispers are true, then Gellius is perhaps the one potential speaker least able to offer an articulate answer.

By drawing our attention more directly to speech already in progress, moreover, at least so far as the perceptive poet is concerned, c. 80 suggests that Catullus's own version of the story is the wittier. The development from feigned ignorance and desired speech, which are in fact deferred speech and prior knowledge, emphasizes the poet's prowess by heightening irony. Catullus is proud of his flair for telling stories that otherwise go unspoken. In poems of the type we have been considering, this means seeming to take part in the ongoing storytelling that "whispers" about the city multivocally. There are many stories constantly being kept silent or rumored. The trick is in overhearing the right ones and then in telling them rightly: the bad ones are best, and the best way to tell them is outrageously.⁴²

Poems like cc. 5, 6, 7, and 80 thus develop a doubled image of discovery or disclosure. On the one hand, there are the stories involved, c. 6's for example only visible, c. 80's evidently both seen and overheard. On the other hand, there is the poet's capacity to articulate those stories by overhearing them in the first place. What is only visible or whispered may as well be "shouted" (as in c. 6's *clamat* and c. 80's *clamant*) in the presence of this poet sensitive to signs and possessed by the excitement, the lascivious proxy thrill, of saying aloud what they signify: *cum tacent, clamant*. So far this has seemed harmless, if highly valued. In later chapters we will listen to Catullus encountering silences of perhaps more consequential types. In the meantime, as well as to prepare the way,

it remains to consider the complex relationships between orality, oral sexuality, and sexualized silence in the other Gellius poems (cc. 74, 88, and 116) and in c. 16.

C. 74

Sexualized silence is strongly emphasized in c. 74. Here Gellius is made the central figure in a family drama that resonates with c. 80's tawdry and viciously funny thematization of silence. Like c. 80, c. 74 is many layered, marked superficially by scurrility alone but at a deeper level showing elegance of structure and a strong development of its theme.⁴³ Again like c. 80, c. 74 also shows thematic and verbal parallels with c. 6.

Gellius had heard his uncle always speak reproachfully

if anyone said or did anything lovably.

Lest this happen to him, he diddled uncle's

wife and turned him into Harpocrates.

He got what he wanted: for, even if he throat-fucks

5

uncle himself, now uncle won't say a word.

Gellius audierat patrum obiurgare solere,

si quis delicias diceret aut faceret.

hoc ne ipsi accideret, patrum perdepserat ipsam

uxorem, et patrum reddidit Arpocratem.

quod uoluit fecit: nam, quamvis irrumet ipsum

5

nunc patrum, uerbum non faciet patruus.

At first glance, Gellius seems here to give as good as he gets in c. 80. Indeed he gives better, for whereas c. 80's Victor was himself diminished, made *misellus*, by the poet's witty story of Victor's only ostensibly dominant achievement of irrumating another man, Gellius *fellatus* is not so clearly characterized in the negative. Instead he is the agent of others' diminishment by threatened change of reputation due, of course, to sexualized silence. We might even call him a force of nemesis, for there is a sense throughout of "just deserts": thanks to Gellius's lewdly appropriate action his rumormongering uncle "won't"—cannot—"say a word" and risk the kind of rumor he himself routinely (*solere*) mongered.⁴⁴

Gellius thus does the previously imposing Victor one better not only by receiving fellatio (in the possible future: *irrumet*) and performing vaginal intercourse (in the certain past: *perdepserat*) but also by controlling

speech. Whereas Gellius had been silenced only naturally, his mouth and tongue occluded by the mechanics of the sex act, he silences his uncle intentionally. Gellius may thus be read as standing in for Catullus's exploration of silence as precisely an intentional, meaningful *socio-cultural* act. There is thus something properly poetic, in terms of Catullus's poetics of silence, in Gellius's sexual activity. Gellius reportedly does in certain outrageous acts what Catullus does in certain outrageous poems: he imposes a sexualized silence.

A MORE SIGNIFICANT SILENCE

At the same time, however, c. 74's complex of speech and silence is not completely in Gellius's favor, for two reasons. First, in the poem's final, vengeful reversal there is a hint of Catullus's concluding observation in c. 22 that none of us is aware of our own bad behavior: "To each has been given his error, but we can't see what is on our own backs" (vv. 20–21: *suus cuique attributus est error; / sed non uidemus manticae quod in tergo est*).⁴⁵ Certainly this applies to the uncle, whose taste of his own medicine—sour-grape-flavored?—is the poem's most obvious joke. Could he have escaped criticism had he avoided criticizing others? I do not think the poem moralizes so unambiguously or offers so simple an image of agency and responsibility. For as in c. 22, so in c. 74 is it also a matter of the po(e)t calling the kettle black, with Gellius giving as good as he gets only because he has already gotten: there is no question that, in Catullus's view, Gellius too has behaved unacceptably (unmanly, inelegantly, tastelessly).⁴⁶ At best, then, Gellius, like any of us, may hope to offset the consequences of behavior by cutting rumor off at the pass, including by starting a rumor that is even more compelling. But of course Gellius is in a way just as silent in c. 74 as he is in c. 80: not within the story but in the poem, that is, in relation to the poet, whose speech is the poem's most silencing.

In this connection, the second reason we may say that Gellius ultimately is diminished or even mastered by silence is the fact that he is able to reposition himself, as active or aggressive instead of passive, only by engaging in activity that is, in the poet's view, truly inappropriate and therefore deserving a more powerfully imposed silence. This activity is of course incestuous sex with his aunt (vaginal intercourse) and his uncle (fellatio). His ostensible mastery of speech and silence is therefore limited, indeed compromised. It is precisely as a result that the poet speaks: only by behaving so badly is Gellius worthy of being spoken about. In a somewhat more complicated way than in c. 6 and

c. 80, then, here the story concealed by silence is a story about one who silences, about his method of enforcing silence, and so about evaluating the ways in which silence may be imposed and understood. In a way ironically and despite himself, Gellius thus serves to figure not his own imposition of silence but the poet's more sophisticated interest: more interesting than natural, physically sexualized silences is silence as a sociocultural construction open to evaluation and change.

That this sort of hierarchy of silences and correspondingly opportunistic speech points to the poet is emphasized in several ways. One way is c. 74's deployment of silence in the form of delay or deferral, on both larger and smaller scales. On the larger scale, the joke as noted is that Gellius gets what he wants, his uncle's silence, at a certain unacceptable expense. Although a complete account of this awaits the concluding lines, the joke is played out with similar delay on a smaller scale at two moments where enjambment serves to emphasize the surprise. At vv. 3–4, the woman whom Gellius "diddled" is revealed only after the line break to be his uncle's wife and thus Gellius's aunt by marriage (*perdepsuit ipsam / uxorem*).⁴⁷ In parallel at vv. 5–6, the man whom Gellius irrumates is revealed, again only after the line break, to be his uncle by blood, that is, his father's brother (*irrumet ipsum / nunc patrum*). Structurally parallel, the two moments represent a development, with a merely "technical" incest (the woman is related to Gellius not by blood but by marriage) giving way to an incest that is "truer" (the man is related by blood) and therefore less acceptable. A sort of victory by Gellius over his uncle thus develops recursively into a joke by Catullus on both men. That the true object of the poet's interest is this more truly unacceptable relationship between the two male relatives is emphasized by the density of the word "uncle" as noun and possessive adjective: it appears five times in only six lines, including twice in the final line. Is it too much to say, then, that the uncle is made to cry uncle, and that his "cry" is indeed a significant silence?

GELLIUS'S HARPOCRATIC UNCLE

Gellius's uncle is figured as a stern moralizer in terms that recall c. 6 and the thematics of its bracketing cc. 5 and 7. Like c. 5's "severe old men," he is ready to pass judgment on others' "love affairs" (*delicias*), for they seem from his perspective "naughty deeds." This would be in line with ancient images of the father's brother (*patruus*) as harsher and stricter than the mother's brother (*auunculus*); the underlying reason perhaps is that the former sees, in children produced within his extended agnatic

"household," his own bloodline at stake.⁴⁸ Since the doer's perspective is shared by the poet (we have seen how he asks arousedly after *delicias*, precisely, in c. 6.1, and will see something similar in c. 68[a], discussed in chapter 4), such a severe uncle is lampooned as out of touch. For he abjures against not only "naughty deeds" (*delicias . . . faceret*) but also "naughty speech" (*diceret*, taking the same direct object), which I would say we may take to include things like Catullus's poems, c. 74 among them. In a poem made possible by its subject's unsophisticated handling of speech and silence, Gellius's uncle's speech is thus simultaneously ineffectual and old-fashioned in taste: evidently he cannot control his own wife and nephew, and it seems that he would be vocal about disliking the sort of poetry to which his own story conduces.⁴⁹

Like the nephew, the uncle is thus ultimately mastered by the poet's imposition of sexualized silence. Ears all pricked by the sound of scandalous *deliciae*, only Catullus is able to make something more of that silence (i.e., more than Gellius could, who rather "acted" than "made" or "did" anything poetically, as well as more than the silenced uncle) by saying that Gellius "turned his uncle into Harpocrates" (v. 4: *patruum reddidit Arpocratem*). Harpocrates is an eastern god, the infant Horus, who is traditionally depicted urging silence with his finger always to his lips. Gellius's uncle's silence, already sexualized, is thus given an additional, weirdly mythological or exoticizing twist. I suspect that Catullus is mostly interested in the visual image as well as perhaps a discomfiting connection between an older man forced to perform oral sex and an infant's oral fixation.⁵⁰ We might say that Gellius's uncle is pacified a bit like a baby.

Such Harpocratic silence is, however, not inherently shameful. As noted, the image of Harpocrates focuses on a symbolic gesture of silence, the finger to the lips, which is of course not identical to fellatio and so may be read more neutrally. In another poem on stories and silence among friends, in fact, Catullus represents *himself* as "really a Harpocrates" when it comes to keeping secrets, closely associating his "faithful silence" with what he adverts is "the deeply known trustworthiness of his spirit" (102.4: *me esse putum Harpocraten*; 1: *tacito . . . fido*; and 2: *sit penitus nota fides animi*, respectively). This may be ironic or humorous; it sounds a bit overblown, especially when Catullus compares himself to those kept silent by sacred oath (v. 3: *me aeque inuenies illorum iure sacratum*).⁵¹ But the comparison is not clearly negative, and certainly it is not shameful.⁵²

In this light, only arguably does c. 74 develop a negative or shameful

force for the image of Harpocrates by turning the baby god's finger at the mouth into a possible phallic symbol. This would be an image of orality overpowering verballity, of something brought to, or inserted into, the mouth and preventing words from coming out. Just as the "usually" (*solere*) verbal uncle is likened in his silence to the ever-silent Harpocrates, the god is no longer infant Horus but instead an infantilized uncle who ought to have preferred his own finger, and thus kept his own judgments silent, over his nephew's penis, a scandalous occurrence indeed. The silence of Gellius's uncle is thus doubled: he performs shame about another's shameful deed and does a shameful deed in his own right. As such he falls precisely into his own trap, prevented from speaking out about a shameful love affair because it is, in fact, his own (*delicias dicens et facens*). Both silencing and silenced, Gellius and his uncle are, literally and figuratively, in this situation together.

On this reading, c. 74 is an effective poem about a particular kind of good deed, that is, a misdeed that is good for poetry and so results in the doer being ironically subjected to a version of what he dishes out: a forcible imposition of sexualized silence. Gellius is subjected to similar silences in two other poems, cc. 88 and 116; these will round out our discussion of Gellius and allow for a transition to c. 16.

Insult, Incest, and Silence in Cc. 88 and 116

In c. 88, Gellius is questioned further about the nature of his sexual activity, and the punishment he has inflicted on his uncle is itself judged worthy of punishment. "What does a man do who won't let his uncle be a husband? / Do you know how despicable an act he undertakes?" (vv. 3-4: *quid facit is, patruum qui non sinit esse maritum? / ecquid scis quantum suscipiat sceleris?*). The opening lines emphasize that the "despicability" or wickedness of Gellius's behavior consists indeed in its incestuous aspect: "What does a man do who gets his itch up with mother and sister, and stays up all night [sc. with them] in the nude?" (vv. 1-2: *Quid facit is, Gelli, qui cum matre atque sorore / prurit et abiectis peruigilat tunicis?*).⁵³ Such perversity is said to be worse than anything, something not even the most abundant or cleanest waters could wash away (vv. 5-6). This is made more specific in the poem's climax, where Gellius's activity is said to be worse even than a man "devouring himself," that is, fellating himself: "there's nothing of wickedness that could go farther than that, / not even if a man devoured himself, his head

bent down" (vv. 7–8: *nam nihil est quicquam sceleris, quo prodeat ultra, / non si demisso se ipse uoret capite*). While Gellius is not directly said to have performed oral sex on himself, clearly that act is intended to characterize the limits of wickedness to which—and beyond which—he is willing to go.

On the one hand, the act is somewhat fantastic. Catullus would need to imagine Gellius as being either very well endowed or very flexible or both, unless the image is—as perhaps more likely—meant to be taken less literally than as a metaphor for his outrageous behavior. There is a way, then, in which c. 88 figures a sort of wishful thinking: through auto-fellatio, a man may seem to enjoy what Roman sexual culture figured as a desirable but dangerous act *without* the danger of being compromised by the *fellator's* oral pollution or, by extension, by rumor. (In this connection, it seems that fellatio was desirable in part because of how it, unlike intercourse, could not lead to pregnancy.) The auto-fellator thus avoids interacting with someone whose willingness to perform oral sex, to accept a sexualized silence, means that his or her actual silence, a sign of his or her trustworthiness, cannot be taken for granted. On the other hand, however, a man in such a position could himself be considered impure due to oral-genital contact. Most importantly for our purposes, he would also be imposing a sexual silence on himself. In this way Catullus might imply Gellius's complicity in his own pillorying in poetry: he is a willing participant in just those sexual activities that conduce to—and deserve—silence.

Finally, then, we may turn to c. 116, where, as Richlin puts it, "the sexual/oral/verbal threat is most fully worked out" such that the poem "has been recognized as programmatic."⁵⁴ Here Catullus reports that he has sought a poem of Callimachus's to translate and send so as to soothe Gellius's hurt feelings, lest the latter direct "hostile spears" against his head (vv. 1–4). His search being in vain, however, and his prayers going unanswered (vv. 5–6), Catullus will send spears of his own, and Gellius, "having been pierced, will pay the price" (vv. 7–8: *at fixus nostris tu dabis supplicium*).

As commentators have noted, c. 116, although it comes last in the collection as that stands, may be read as initiating the sequence of poems insulting Gellius.⁵⁵ In addition to anticipating their sentiments explicitly, it may also hint at their force via a metrical ambiguity in its final line, which may be scanned either as the shorter line of the elegiac couplet ("pentameter") or as an iambic senarius of the sort common to abusive poetry and comedy.⁵⁶ The first scansion depends on a feature that

is otherwise unattested in Catullus: discounting of word-final -s, here ending *dabis*, such that the syllable -bi- scans as short before *supplicium*. This would be archaizing ("as Kroll remarks, it was taboo to the poets of the avant-garde in Rome").⁵⁷ It could also indicate an allusion to Ennius's description of Romulus's promise to punish his brother, Remus, for jumping over the newly built walls of Rome: "You will pay to me a penalty in your hot blood" (1.94–95 Skutsch: *mi calido dabis sanguine poenas*), where the same metrical feature appears (at *dabis*).⁵⁸

C. 116's role as introducing the *libellus* in reverse would thus be strengthened by implicit themes of brotherly obligation in particular and familial duty more generally; these are discussed relative to the poems dealing with the death of Catullus's brother in chapters 4 and 5. In the meantime, for our purposes what matters more is an implicit possibility of sexualized silence. The poem turns on a common double entendre in *tela*, simultaneously "weapons," including "poems," and "penises."⁵⁹ Aimed as they are at the head, these may be understood as figuring, if not *irrumatio* in particular, then a more general forcible imposition of sexualized silence. If we accept the suggestion that c. 116 is a programmatic poem, then such silence would be marked as a consciously prominent feature of the poems indeed. In combination with c. 1, c. 116—and with it the other Gellius poems—would put just that kind of silence at the center of charming or witty poetry.

Imposed and Impossible Silences in C. 16

Poems about Gellius have allowed us to see more clearly how sexualized silence is related to different modalities of speech, linking in particular poetry and public discourse. We may return, then, to the slender pun between *ir-rum-atio*, "forcible imposition of fellatio," and *rum-or*, "rumor"; although the words have different roots, for Catullus they seem to overlap meaningfully insofar as both conduce to poetically convenient silence.⁶⁰ *Ir-rum-atio* accomplishes this by occlusion, literally blocking the capacity for articulate speech; since that is the sort of speech taken to define human language, *irrumatio* renders its target not only less masculine but also in a way less human. *Rum-or* accomplishes its silence by preclusion: something else has always already been said, muttered, whispered by somebody other than the potential speaker. Taken together, these modes of silence would exemplify late Republican Roman culture's discursive constructions of opportunities for speech

and speaking subjects.⁶¹ Catullus thus brings his subjects into being, as potential speakers and as they are actually silent, by fashioning the poetic spaces within which they, as his poetic fictions, may not speak.

In line with Catullus's metapoetic commitments, those poetic spaces tend to be relatively small and close, settings for sexual and other interpersonal interactions and associated feelings. In later chapters we will see Catullus come to grips with how the interaction of spaces and speech may truly limit the poet, with silence as the strictly limiting condition of speech.⁶² In the meantime, we may round out this chapter's discussion of orality, oral sexuality, and sexualized silence by turning to what is perhaps their single most striking articulation: c. 16. Keeping in mind what we have seen is Catullus's programmatic interest in a poetics of silence, I argue that c. 16 effects a metapoetically amazing and impossible imposition of silence on the speaking poet himself.

SEXUALIZED VIOLENCE AND POETIC PERFORMANCE

C. 16 is often noted for how it conceals, behind aggressive language, a sophisticated interest in communication, interpretation, and intent.⁶³ It is thus frequently cited as being the first, clearest statement in antiquity of the "(auto)biographical fallacy," which will be discussed in greater detail later. But no less interesting, in our attempt to overhear Catullus's own interest in silence, is the poem's outrageous violation of traditional verbal taboos. Forceful and seemingly unapologetic, c. 16 thus exemplifies how poetry of great sophistication and complexity may be fashioned out of ordinary vulgarity or even brutality and, indeed, draw a surprising power from them.

I'll fuck your asses and I'll fuck your throats:
 Aurelius you take it, Furius you faggot,
 who think, from my little verses,
 since they're a little soft, that I'm insufficiently chaste.
 For while it's fitting for a pious poet himself 5
 to be chaste, there's no similar need for his poems,
 which, in the end, have savor and charm
 if they are "a little soft" and "insufficiently chaste"
 and can get that naughty itch up
 (I don't mean in boys, but in those hairy 10
 men who can't get their guts to move).
 You think, since you read many thousands
 of kisses, that I'm badly manly?
 I'll fuck your asses and I'll fuck your throats.

pedicabo ego uos et irrumabo,
 Aureli pathice et cinaede Furi,
 qui me ex uersiculis meis putastis,
 quod sunt molliculi, parum pudicum.
 nam castum esse decet pium poetam 5
 ipsum, uersiculos nihil necesse est;
 qui tum denique habent salem ac leporem,
 si sunt molliculi ac parum pudici,
 et quod pruriat incitare possunt,
 non dico pueris, sed his pilosis 10
 qui duros nequeunt mouere lumbos.
 uos, quod milia multa basiorum
 legistis, male me marem putatis?
 pedicabo ego uos et irrumabo.

C. 16's opening line is a shocking way to start a poem, even in light of Gellius's alleged behaviors, even if a sequential reading of the corpus has prepared us to expect some vulgarity and sexual obscenity (cc. 6, 9, 11).⁶⁴ So shocked, as we overhear the poem we are at risk of being overpowered by its threat, put into multiple verbal and metaphorically sexual positions. At the same time, by reading the poem there is a way in which we adopt the speaker's words as our own, giving voice to him as well as being ventriloquized by him. As we are made thus to assume his position, we talk ourselves—the poem talks us—into a particularly charged sort of sexual activity. C. 16 thus constitutes an image of complex relationships in and around language, in particular Catullus's highly valued poetic language as it comprises various silences, including violently sexualized silence.

Framed as it is by that shocking, violent line, the poem as a whole might be read as threatening. But in the context of Catullus's ironizing poetics, we may hear the threat as exaggerated, not so much sincerely masculine as ironically hypermasculine. In this way Catullus would be aping and therefore parodying either the particular criticisms claimed by the poem to have been made against the poet or perhaps the critics' more generally uncharming language and manner. As I hear it, then, c. 16's sexualized aggression is in the service of exposing and exploring that paradox in social performance, in which brusque masculinity is, if effective, a matter of exceedingly fine positioning indeed.⁶⁵ Ideally one is positioned at the point precisely between praiseworthy sexual activity and "excessive" interest in the "wrong" kinds of intimacy. This of course is precisely the point at which Catullus's poetics of silence would

place the most charming or witty—the most outrageous—poetry, including of course his own.

PHYSICAL LANGUAGE ABOUT HOW TO LISTEN QUIETLY
TO POETRY

C. 16's exploration of performance and silence in masculinity and poetry is framed as a lesson to Catullus's listeners and readers. Although Furius and Aurelius are named, the lesson is meant to apply more generally.⁶⁶ Indeed, the general reader, instantiated by the reader of the current poem, is expected to do better than those two: if she or he—if we—do not, then the joke of the poem has fallen flat. In particular the lesson and its humor concern why such a thing as excessive sexuality—too many kisses, threats of sexual violence, a resultant sexualized silence—can be funny, the stuff of “charming” or “witty” poetry.⁶⁷ C. 16 thus serves to confirm what we have seen is a central interest in Catullus's poetry.

I therefore wish to expand somewhat on Thomson, who suggests, following Quinn, that *irrumare* is used in a manner of “figurative language” typical of Catullus, such that the emphasis falls on *pedicare*, otherwise used only “in a literal sense” and thus “outside the regular extravagances of literary obscenity.”⁶⁸ In line with the argument I have sought to advance in this chapter so far, *irrumare* may be “figurative” only in light of its literal meaning: literally occlusive of speech, the forcible imposition of oral sex therefore serves to figure—is an index of—an imposition of more broadly metaphorical silences. Following Thomson, we may therefore read *pedicare*, too, for a figurative extension of its literal meaning. Traditionally it is an imposition of anal sex on a usually younger male by a more aggressive, older male. In the Greek its etymology is “to treat someone like a boy/child.” *Pedicare* thus figures anal sex as part of a relationship that is *pedagogic*: “leading someone like a child” and thus clearly to Romans who knew Greek, “educating” them (etymologically likewise “leading”).⁶⁹

With this in mind, we may say that c. 16 frames its topic by positioning certain readers as if they were slow or recalcitrant children who must first be made to stop talking so that they may learn how to listen. In this way, c. 16 has much to say about poetry's capacity for bootstrapping itself into existence as an utterance by compelling others' silence: insofar as they are receptive to the poet's sexually aggressive teaching, they may be made into competent readers. C. 16 thus links orality, oral

as well as anal sex, and sexualized silences to the question of how to read or listen rightly.

As Catullus puts the criticisms leveled against him, incompetent readers like Furius and Aurelius mistakenly “think from [his] little verses, since they’re a little soft, that [he] is insufficiently chaste” (vv. 3–4: *me ex uersiculis meis putastis, / quod sunt molliculi, parum pudicum*). The ostensible problem is that Catullus’s poems make the poet himself seem “unmanly.” But the actual, metapoetic problem is that any such semblance is due to mistaken reading, to reading that does not take sufficient account of Catullus’s ironic poetics. Catullus takes the occasion of this criticism (whether real or fictive, theirs or of his own invention) as an opportunity to speak both outrageously and metapoetically. Criticized for behaving as an adult male does not, he turns the criticism on its head to teach older, more traditional adult males what (in)appropriate truly is (vv. 10–11). The result is, as in the cases of cc. 6, 80, and others, outrageously good poetry.

In this connection, the crucial critical terms are *molliculi*, “a little soft,” and *parum pudicum*, “insufficiently chaste” or even, it seems, “excessively receptive to male sexual advance.”⁷⁰ In its form, the diminutive *molliculi* echoes the diminutive *uersiculis*, “little verses,” and thus makes those poems echo in turn with the allegation of insufficient masculinity: they are “too soft” derogatorily, and by extension so is their composing poet. Catullus disagrees not primarily for biographical reasons but in order to advance his diametrically opposed standard of evaluation for poetry and poet. The terms cast at him as negatives are now positive. “Little verses” (*uersiculi*, as distinct perhaps from longer poems?) impress Catullus when they move beyond traditional behavior, including heteronormative sexuality. Precisely this sort of transgression, as concretized in violation of linguistic taboos, constitutes a poem’s “savor and charm” (v. 6: *salem ac leporem*).⁷¹

UNCOUNTABLE KISSES AND AN IMPOSSIBLE IMPOSITION OF SILENCE

There is reason to think that the poems kept in mind by Catullus’s incompetent readers are cc. 5, 7, and 48 or perhaps lost poems like them: “kiss” poems. Rounding out c. 16 by returning from the “reading lesson” to his addressees’ criticisms, Catullus asks: “You think, since you read many thousands of kisses, that I’m badly manly?” (v. 12–13: *uos, quod milia multa basiorum / legistis, male me marem putatis?*). “Many

thousands of kisses" recalls in particular c. 5 (with "many thousands," *basia mille* and *centum*, in vv. 7–10, plus *basiorum* in v. 14) and c. 48 (with kisses numbering "up to three hundred thousand" [v. 3: *usque ad milia basiem trecenta*] and beyond). Which poem, if either, is to be preferred is a matter of debate, centered mainly around whether Lesbia, the female beloved in many poems, or Juventius, a male beloved featured in a few, is a likelier candidate for causing Catullus to be criticized thus for kissing. For our purposes it does not really matter.⁷²

More important than which kisser, then, is how the question helps c. 16 to develop the metapoetic claim that the fictional performance in a poem is more significant than any real activities of the poet. In other words, a poem thus depends in part on a silence it impossibly imposes on the historical poet himself. From this perspective, Catullus's opening question in c. 16 ("you think . . . ?"; *putastis*) is not only rhetorical in the usual sense—his readers are clearly alleged to think that he is unmanly—but also ironical: they have misread, and so they do not think rightly. The irony consists in the difference between how, prior to this moment, Furius and Aurelius have mistaken poem(s) for poet and how, now, Catullus and we current readers must not. This is a kind of classical dramatic irony, in which readers know something that characters (here, the addressees) do not. As we are made to voice Catullus's words, it is as if we are sharing a space with him while, to put it loosely, he sticks it to Furius and Aurelius. But that irony is also problematic, for we are able to be positioned as better readers than the addressees only if we take the current poem at its word . . . and thus risk repeating the readerly procedure that previously led the addressees astray. If Furius and Aurelius were wrong to judge Catullus by his poems, how may we be certain of being right about him—his manliness, his poetics—here?

Here, then, is the impossible sort of silence imposed by c. 16. For us to accept its central claim, that poem and poet are distinct, we must hear the poem to the exclusion of its poet: the poem thus imposes its requisite silence *on its own composing poet*. But c. 16 is entirely in the poet's "own" voice: composed by him, it also sounds quite like the "Catullus" familiar to us from other poems (in the first person and otherwise). In a way, then, Catullus in c. 16 goes one step further than the self-silencing Gellius does in c. 88. Is it possible that in c. 16 Catullus suggests that all poetry, even "lyric" poetry of this metrical sort and shape, is "dramatic," in the manner of a performance in the theater?

Certainly Catullus's poetry has been taken as performative of cul-

tural modes that affect (and effect) identity. C. 16, although it takes for granted that a poem may be *like* a person, insists nonetheless that the poem *is not* a person. This is true even—or especially?—when the poem purports to be part of an actual conversation overheard. In that case, as in the poems we have been considering, the speaking subject or narrative *persona* is not necessarily the same as the historical *person* of the author.⁷³ C. 16 thus exists as if to say that “any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.”

We may wonder now how exactly Aurelius and Furius failed, in Catullus’s view, to understand this. With a poetics of silence in mind, I wonder whether it is because they have been precisely readers instead of being listeners. Do they see only the words, or do they read aloud only in their own incorrect voices, unable to tell the difference between the poem’s voice (that of the *persona*’s within it) and the poet’s (that of the person historically behind it)? In this way they mistake an appearance of authenticity for the essence of the author and so have given Catullus the chance to argue wittily against such biographical fallacy.⁷⁴ They would serve, like Flavius, as the straight men indeed, unwittingly—witlessly—providing the occasion for Catullus’s charming, witty poetry. We may also hear Aurelius and Furius as listening in a way that results in an “autobiographical fallacy”: they may be prevented from understanding that ironic, dramatic distinction in part because in reading Catullus aloud they hear their *own* voices too loudly and thus mistake their own tone for his.

Part of reading well is, as we have seen, to accept a poem’s propositions with some willingness. Aurelius and Furius resist, mistaking as a passive reception of male advance what is, in fact, an active, even aggressive imposition of silence by poetry. That poetic imposition is fully the equal of, if not felt to be superior to, the sexualized silence caused by *irrumatio*. On this reading, c. 16’s hairy old men, incapable of getting it up, would stand in for those readers who are unwilling or unable to accept the novel sorts of readerly silence that Catullus considers necessary for witty poetry. Their reading, from a rather more traditional perspective, misses the point: not the number of kisses, which could hardly have been startling even in antiquity; or even the fact that kisses, of all trifling things, implicitly take the place of sexual activity that is perhaps more directly expressive of traditional masculinity. The point is rather that, as we have seen, oral sexual activity is figured as leading to a charming and witty imposition of *mutual* silence. Now that *nobody*,

really, is speaking, certainly not in traditional terms, innovative, intimate poetry may take over the position of power previously occupied by tedious and potentially dangerous rumor.

Sexualized Silence and Catullus's Écouteurist Reader

Part of the pleasure of the sorts of poems considered in this chapter is, however, precisely the overlap—or, perhaps, the mutual penetration?—of rumormongering and outrageous poetry. As we have seen, Catullus's poetry gives a vivid impression of being overheard and so seems to shade from a traditional understanding of poetry as public declamation to a more "modern" sense of poetry as an utterance employing the same social networks as rumor, gossip, or other incompletely public speech. In this way poetry indeed comprises what Krostenko has called the "language of social performance." In the particular future predicted by c. 16, we may thus imagine mistaken readers like Furius and Aurelius, subjected as they are to a sort of poetic *irrumatio* and *pedicatio*, thinking that any heavily sexualized silence is precisely "shameful to admit" (6.5: *hoc pudet fateri*). From the perspective of Catullus's poetics of silence, however, as I have sought to show, such shame is rather old-fashioned, unnecessary, and, what is worse, uninteresting. It is worth recalling here that Catullus sees value in describing himself, in certain poems, as on the receiving end of silences, sexual and otherwise: as noted, he is subjected to *irrumatio* in cc. 10 and 28, and as we will see later (esp. in chapters 4 through 6), he is afflicted by other types of silences elsewhere. In Catullus's hands, quite a wide range of silences is thus put to sophisticated poetic ends.

What does this mean for how Catullus's poetics of silence accommodates a "general reader"? Although c. 16 expects readers other than Furius and Aurelius to better appreciate wit and charm, as noted the poem is in places somewhat ambiguous about whom, precisely, the poet has in mind for sexualized silence. By the second line, Furius and Aurelius are explicitly present, both directly addressed (in the vocative) and described so as to make the force of Catullus's attack clear (*Aureli pathice et cinaede Furi*).⁷⁵ But by definition that specificity is somewhat delayed. Read on its own, the first line—emphasized by being repeated as the last line—is ambiguous in its referent and so may be taken as applying more generally: when Catullus threatens *irrumatio* and *pedicatio*, it is to "you," the (second-person) plural. If not (yet) Aurelius and Furius,

who, then, (for the time being) satisfies the meaning of this ambiguous, unclear, general plural “you”?

Hearing the poem aloud, we do. The “you” who is to be corrected of tediously straightforward reading, “treated like an errant child” by being educated through forcible imposition of sexualized silence, includes *us*. We seem to overhear a speaking subject threaten sexual violence; we are therefore positioned as voyeurs or, more properly, *écouteurs*: we desire to listen. Although as noted in the introduction to this chapter, how one responds to Catullus’s sexual humor may be a personal matter, I would nonetheless say that when Catullus makes us listen, it has the disturbing force of a “primal scene.”

This is more forceful in that, again, Catullus has us not only listen to “the rough stuff” but also speak it aloud: through that perfectly ordinary reading aloud, a rightly plural “we” is commandeered by the first-person singular.⁷⁶ (“*Nous est un autre*”: we are an other.) As a result, also again, in being made to take Catullus’s place, we assume his position indeed and thus talk ourselves into taking part in his sexual activity. Beyond being made to watch or listen, we are made to utter interpersonal secrets and sexual threats, breaking the silence of the poet’s own voice as well as silencing our own voices so as to take on the persona of the aggressor.

Reading c. 16, we may thus linger unconsciously over v. 1—is there an iconic force to the elision between *pedicabo* and *ego*, linking “forcible imposition of anal sex” and “I, the speaker”? And we may feel a certain satisfaction at its second coming as v. 14. By returning to and so emphasizing ambiguity of identity, the poem’s ring structure leaves permanently open the question of just how it is we readers are imagined as acting or as being acted upon. To the extent that we are *not* the speaker, to the extent that we are a “we”—a plural as against his singular—and aware of our differences from him along other axes (time, place, gender, culture, etc.), we are, in the end, his “you”: the object, as in c. 6, of a solitary, even masturbatory fantasy that is simultaneously vulgar and worthy of witty poetry.⁷⁷

By reading c. 16 aloud, by being put into multiple positions—verbal and sexual, overhearing and overheard, speaking, silencing, and silenced, forcing and being forced—we make that threesome fantasy of c. 6 come poetically “true.” We are, and are able to give, the poem what it wants: not biographical or autobiographical fallacy but, as it were, graphical fellacy, as the poem puts itself as words into our mouths and make use of our tongues to bring its written meanings to others’ ears. In

this way we readers are the poet's dream come true: as he expresses it in c. 55, "Venus takes pleasure in wordy talk" (v. 20: *uerbosa gaudet Venus loquela*), so in a way the more (silenced) mouths, the better.

As we read aloud, then, we are made by what we read to position ourselves complexly between speech and silence. The activity is properly vocal, but to the extent that we vocalize another person's words, it is also a kind of compliance: we are a little mastered, depending on the words, perhaps even a little animal or domesticated as we become the poem's "vocal tool" (*instrumentum vocale*). The poems considered in this chapter thus develop a metapoetic parallel to what I argue is a central feature of Catullus's poetics, namely, its attention to the silences that necessarily precede and surround a poem. The historical person of the author is replaced by the persona, a speaking subject that is strictly fictional, fashioned or made, while the actual speaker, the reader, finds his or her speech repurposed by that fiction.

With positions thus changed and reevaluated, the evaluative language of c. 16's central lines represents Catullus's recuperation of traditionally or publicly undesirable personal qualities as precisely the qualities most desirable in poetry. Again, verses "in the end, have wit and charm / if they are 'a little soft' and 'insufficiently chaste'" (vv. 7–8: *qui tum denique habent salem ac leporem / si sunt molliculi ac parum pudici*). This suggests a kind of inversion of "the language of social performance," revealing its fluidity in accommodating, and being improved by, a delicious tastelessness. In this connection, a student of mine once described Catullus as like a lucid drunk: drunk just enough to tell it like it is but semisweetly, maybe bitterly, indeed a bit salty.⁷⁸ In a way like Alcibiades in the *Symposium*, this Catullus is loose-tongued enough to be entertaining and at least slightly embarrassing, giving voice to certain truths even as he speaks in truisms including sexual threats.

As I have sought to emphasize in the introductions to these first two chapters, not everyone may wish to take part in such poetry, as the caricatures of Aurelius and Furius tweakingly suggest; nor may just anyone be able to. In the next chapter we will see ways in which Catullus pursues this sense of distinction among readers in other poems, linking it to a grosser distinction between all readers, as people, and poetry as an impersonal whole. In the meantime, and by way of transitioning to poems on topics other than the vulgar or sexual, we may say that, its vulgarity aside, the frame of c. 16 suggests by iteration the sort of insult that can positively characterize communication among friends who are

intimately familiar with each other and, as a precondition, capable of appreciating each other's work. Like c. 6, then, c. 16 imagines an aural/oral world in which one verbal turn deserves another, and (in)appropriate silence counts as one of those verbal turns.

In the poems considered so far, silence is a kind of "speech," even as it obscures, occludes, takes advantage of, embarrasses, and more. In c. 6, for example, it was Flavius's fruitless silence that gave Catullus the chance to invent and then reveal his friend's story. In c. 16, Catullus takes a dimwitted misreading of his poems and person as a chance to teach even dullards about this new poetry, deliciously different in taste. If such poems seem to position Catullus a bit like the "severe old men" whose rumors he sought to discount in c. 5, at this point in our attention to his poetics of silence we may say he goes further. For Catullus—any poet—must respond to rumors already being mongered about him, to the fact that stories are always already circulating, outside and prior to poetry. Catullus thus figures as a chancy good the fact that his own mouth and tongue are not so occupied, by kissing or other oral activity, that he cannot speak and speak powerfully. This is true even—especially—when silence seems to be imposed, impossibly or paradoxically, as much on the poet by his poem as by the poet on his readers and addressees. Such constellations of characters serve to figure, in miniature, the larger, more complex social interactions implied by many of Catullus's poems. It is to the question of silence, and the poetics of silence, in society that we now turn.

3

Poets, Poems, and Poetry

Cc. 22 and 36 (plus 50)

I have made this poem for you, my sweet.

50.16: *hoc, iucunde, tibi poema feci*

The sexualized silence discussed in chapter 2 served to illustrate how natural and sociocultural silences may be made to interact in a poem. Oral sexuality in particular, as exemplified in Catullus by kissing and *irrumatio*, results in silence naturally through preclusion or occlusion of the mouth and tongue. That silence is evaluated and interpreted in turn by members of societies professing certain cultural traditions or norms as well as seeking innovation or experiencing change. In terms of a poetics of silence, Catullus thus seems to value each sexualized silence for how its unspoken backstory, whether real or fictional, may be spoken aloud by the innovative poet in outrageous violations of traditional linguistic taboos. As we have seen now in both chapters 1 and 2, thus does Catullus define, at least in part, charming or witty poetry.

Sexualized silence is, however, only one aspect of Catullus's poetics of silence. Other types of silence also give the poet the chance to seem to be overheard, and of course Catullus responds to silence in ways that go beyond charm or wit. Likewise, not every poem thematizes silence explicitly. Our next step toward comprehending Catullus's poetics of silence more fully is therefore to consider poems whose silences are not—or not mainly—sexual, poems in which Catullus seems to aim for more than charm or wit, as well as poems that relate to silence without necessarily thematizing it explicitly.

In this chapter my main examples are poems whose silences and moments of speech are less specifically sexual and more generally interpersonal and social: c. 22 ("That Suffenus, Varus, whom you know well"; *Suffenus iste, Vare, quem probe nosti*) and c. 36 ("Annals of Volusius, shitty sheets"; *Annales Volusi, cacata carta*), alongside another listen to c. 50 ("Yesterday, Licinius, a day of leisure"; *Hesterno, Licini, die otiosi*). Since these poems are expressly metapoetic, focusing on poets and their work, they allow us to develop more clearly Catullus's image of the interaction of poems, poets, and poetry as they relate to silence and, through it, relate to each other. To anticipate this chapter's argument, we may say that in light of Catullus's poetics of silence, poems are treated less for their language—in a way they are silenced—than as material, as objects that serve in part to figure social interaction. Poets themselves are likewise considered less for any details of their linguistic artistry than as living symbols of exemplary language use and so, perforce and perhaps despite themselves, as relating to silence in especially freighted ways.

Finally, poetry considered as a whole or in the abstract tends, quite paradoxically for reasons concerning its insistence on utterance, toward what would seem to be its natural opposite, absolute silence including the natural silence of death. At the furthest extreme, such metapoetic contemplation of poetry calls into question the value of language as well as our value as beings-in-language. The ultimate question is whether language, even outstanding poetic language, suffices against the silences that precede, surround, and threaten to follow it. As we will see in later chapters (4 through 6), Catullus indeed raises this question in certain poems, considering in particular what we might call the negative consequences of poetry's power to preserve memory indiscriminately of topic.

In the meantime, cc. 22 and 36, and with them c. 50, will let us see more clearly how Catullus figures silence as among the rhetorical or "performative" elements of late Roman Republican culture.¹ In c. 22 this takes the form of a cultural paradox: an elegant man takes great pleasure in composing what Catullus, at least, regards as extremely inelegant poetry; but if that man comes in for criticism as a poet, so do we all for flaws that are hidden from us. Although Catullus's metaphor at that concluding moment is visual—"we cannot see" (v. 21: *non uideamus*) our own flaws—the underlying observation nonetheless resonates with a poetics of silence as Catullus once more constructs a poem out of speaking aloud such tacit truth. In c. 36 there is a similar ambiguity about whose poems, precisely, are described as low-quality ("shitty";

vv. 1 and 20: *cacata*)—the speaking poet's or another's?—and likewise who is best not only at composing poetry but, more subtly, at judging it. As hinted at already, the answers to those questions would seem to have little or nothing to do with the language of the poems. With attention drawn to the poems as material objects transferable among people, the act of criticism, the discussion of poems, serves instead to figure social interactions.

In late Republican Rome, social interactions meant, more or less inevitably, evaluations, as members of (elite literary) society were subjected to more or less continual scrutiny.² As Gaisser notes regarding cc. 22 and 36, poetic “failures like Suffenus [in c. 22] and Volusius [in c. 36] were convicted of both a literary and a social sin: lack of *urbanitas*.”³ *Urbanitas*, something like “the urbane behavior associated with the elite culture of the city,” is a shifting standard of evaluation; its uncertain definition must have caused anxiety.⁴ Not even a Catullus is recorded as saying aloud just anything, at least not at just any moment or without carefully delimiting his ostensible audience; as we have seen, for example, poems involving sexualized silence name their addressees.⁵ Wit and charm are not completely defined by outrageous speech but also depend on its opposite, that is, knowing when—and among whom—to maintain a certain silence. Such social silence is equal parts tactful and artful.⁶ From this historicizing perspective, Catullus's interest in silence is, among other things, a way to negotiate the complex and changing demands of a particularly demanding society, one whose members assiduously concerned themselves with questions of “taste.”⁷

As we will see expressly in certain poems, poets as speaking subjects are themselves not exempt from social evaluation including negative criticism. As a result we are, I would say, invited to wonder not whether Catullus has kept parts of the stories quiet—there is no question—but rather which parts he has suppressed, for certainly we have here examples of stories that Catullus does *not* speak completely aloud but keeps at least partially in silence. Poems like cc. 22 and 36 thus provide examples of poetry whose value or currency consists in *not* saying, that is, in ostentatiously keeping a kind of silence. This need not be due to anxiety or another, similarly “serious” reason. But even humorous poems, including cc. 22 and 36 as well as 50, serve in this context to raise fascinating and potentially destabilizing questions about poets, their poems, and the abstraction of poetry in relation to silence in a relentlessly scrutinizing society. How to be both a speaking subject, keeping other potential speakers silent, and a spoken subject, in a way silenced

by one's own poetry as well as discourse more generally? What of one's self is defined or performed in utterance? Likewise, how much of our being goes unspoken? Perhaps more troublingly for beings-in-language, how much of our being, seemingly so linguistic indeed, actually consists in its silence? By considering these sorts of questions, we will develop more clearly an image of Catullus as an exemplary language user indeed, a literary Roman whose interest in language and its limits draws him ineluctably toward its boundary-condition of silence.

C. 22

That Suffenus, Varus, whom you know well,
 is a charming man, well spoken and urbane,
 and—the same man—makes by far the most verses.
 I, for my part, think that by him a thousand or ten thousand or more
 have been written and not, as it's done, shared 5
 on recycled paper: but rolls of new royal papyrus,
 new rolling cylinders, ruddy straps, covers,
 all ruled with lead and smoothed by a pumice stone.
 When you read these, that beautiful, urbane
 Suffenus, one and the same, seems a milker of goats, 10
 a ditchdigger: so much does he bristlingly differ and change.
 What are we to think of this? The man who just now
 seemed a wit, or something wittier than that,
 he comes across hicker than a backwoods hick
 as soon as he touches his poems, nor is he ever 15
 quite so happy as when he's composing:
 so pleased is he in himself, so much does he wonder at himself.
 But all of us are similarly, excessively deceived, nor is there anyone
 whom you might not see, in some thing or another, as
 Suffenus. To each is given his own error, 20
 but we don't see what is on our own backs.

Suffenus iste, Vare, quem probe nosti,
 homo est uenustus et dicax et urbanus,
 idemque longe plurimos facit uersus.
 puto esse ego illi milia aut decem aut plura
 perscripta, nec sic ut fit in palimpsesto 5
 relata: cartae regiae nouae libri,
 noui umbilici, lora rubra, membranae,
 directa plumbo et pumice omnia aequata.

haec cum legas tu, bellus ille et urbanus
 Suffenus unus caprimulgus aut fossor 10
 rursus uidetur: tantum abhorret ac mutat.
 hoc quid putemus esse? qui modo scurra
 aut siquid hac re scitius uidebatur,
 idem infaceto est infacetior rure,
 simul poemata attingit, neque idem umquam 15
 aequae est beatus ac poema cum scribit:
 tam gaudet in se tamque se ipse miratur.
 nimirum idem omnes fallimur, nec est quisquam
 quem non in aliqua re uidere Suffenum
 possis. suus cuique attributus est error; 20
 sed non uidemus manticae quod in tergo est.

On its surface, it is perhaps c. 22's conclusion that has attracted the most attention.⁸ Especially in contrast to the jocular tone and particular detail of the preceding lines, the final two lines stand out for their sober emphasis on the more general tendency of all human beings—including poets—to be mistaken about their own virtues and faults. C. 22 thus seems to move from tart, even acid criticism of another man's work to a more balanced observation of how no one can be exempt from criticism since such things as faults or flaws are evaluated, or even simply perceived, by self and by others differently. Since this situation must include the current speaker, we may suspect that any sting in the poem's tail would be directed most naturally, ironically, at Catullus himself. As the speaker, Catullus has of course spent the poem criticizing Suffenus's poetry. Should we infer, then, that Catullus's own work has come in for like criticism? Or since c. 22 has also focused on the difference between Suffenus's poetry and the man himself, may we hear beneath c. 22's audible surface a story, as in c. 16, about Catullus coming under more personal attack, in this case as a "country boy"—a Transpadane—mocked by truer urbanites as being, no matter his family's wealth, very like a "milker of goats or ditchdigger" (v. 10: *caprimulgus aut fossor*)?

I suggest later in this discussion that a sort of insecurity may indeed be operative in c. 22, perhaps alongside jealousy or envy in a way similar to what we noticed in c. 6 (chapter 1). With irony, the difference between surface and depths, in mind, I emphasize here that of course we cannot know such things about the historical Catullus with any certainty. Like all of Catullus's poems that seem to be drawn from life, c. 22 is complicated by the metapoetic and biographical ironies we have seen in several poems and that are made perhaps most pointed in c. 16. If the

poet as a person is to be distinguished from his poems, then how are we to know whether c. 22's manifest literary ironies are in the service of an authentic or sincere depiction of lived experience? Although we cannot decide for sure, I would say again that c. 22 nonetheless gives the particular impression of letting us overhear Catullus *not* saying something aloud, of keeping something just out of earshot, to himself. It is just possible that, as the conversation recorded by the poem progresses, Catullus starts to hear himself hitting too close to home. On this reading, the poem's conclusion would represent a turning point in Catullus's thinking.

Of course, any such change of mind need not be long lasting or, for that matter, real. For our purposes, however, what is important is that c. 22 would thus represent Catullus saying aloud in a poem *only part* of what he is thinking while rather more is kept quiet. This mode of ironic speech is, perhaps paradoxically, both opposite and complementary to the mode we have seen predominate in the poems discussed so far. It is indeed the case, as we have seen Martial observe, that in telling such stories Catullus keeps more quiet. But over the course of c. 22, instead of ostentatiously delighting in saying what someone else *could be saying* but *is not* (as in c. 6), Catullus seems to turn down his own volume incrementally. Somewhere between saying outrageously aloud and keeping tactfully silent, then, Catullus situates not only an ironic, charming or witty disclosure but also an ironic concealment.

That concealment can be rather serious. We may thus say that, while c. 22 seems at first to give a typical impression of being conversation overheard, and moreover of knowing that it is overheard, in its particular form it represents a conversation rather more uniquely at the point of turning serious, turning from a jocular take on literary criticism to a more thoughtful interest in what might be called ethical questions. Although, as we will see later, this represents a step toward confronting, in certain poems, the fact that even sociocultural silences may suggest the natural, absolute silence of death, long before then, the fact that silence is part of human interaction affords Catullus's poems a warmer, richer energy. Poised at that turning point, c. 22 tells a story whose content is neither the stuff of ephemeral rumor exactly nor an action worthy of immortality in culture. This sort of story must occupy a relatively unmapped space between traditional genres and the "trifles" (*nugae*) that we have seen are programmatic in Catullus's innovative poetics.⁹ Perhaps even more so than in the case of rumormongering including vulgarity and obscenity, it is not immediately clear why Catullus's criticism

of Suffenus's poetry is itself a "story" to be told in poetry. There is the silk purse, but where is the sow's ear? To phrase the question in terms of a poetics of silence, what silence does Catullus break or keep in c. 22 by telling this story in this way?

UNCOUNTABLE POEMS AND SYMPATHETIC POETS

As I have hinted, in my view the answer involves how discussion of poems, including criticism of poetry, serves to figure interpersonal interaction and evaluation in society, and likewise how silence in a rhetorical mode of ironic concealment is evidently an important part of social practice. In c. 22 all of this begins with criticism of the poet Suffenus, first positive about his person and then, it seems, negative about his poetry: "he is a charming man, well-spoken and urbane, / and—the same man—makes by far the most verses" (vv. 2–3: *homo est uenustus et dicax et urbanus, / idemque longe plurimos facit uersus*). "What are we to think of this?" (v. 12: *hoc quid putemus esse?*), asks Catullus. I hear the question as ironic but not wholly rhetorical: Catullus has in mind something of an answer, but c. 22 on its own and in combination with certain other poems suggests that he is also left with questions.¹⁰

"By far the most verses" might already imply a negative evaluation of Suffenus's poetry in that, in a Callimachean poetics like Catullus's, size matters: since "a big book is a big evil," there is such a thing as writing too much. This would seem to be specified somewhat in the following lines: Catullus, "for [his] part, think[s] that by [Suffenus] a thousand or ten thousand or more / have been written" (vv. 4–5: *puto esse ego illi milia aut decem aut plura / perscripta*). The uncountability of Suffenus's verses suggests a kind of incomprehensibility: they cannot be grasped.

It is not clear, however, whether "uncountably many verses" is in fact a negative. We may note the similarity between Suffenus's uncountable poems and cc. 5's, 7's, and 48's uncountable kisses, all in the "thousands" (*milia*). As we have seen, those kisses are uncountable purposefully and positively: their impossibly high number serves to protect Catullus and his lovers from rumor and from evil, hexing speech. We may wonder, then, whether the uncountability of Suffenus's poems is likewise a positive for their composing poet, and a "negative" only in the eyes of those who would read him wrongly, whether mongering rumors like c. 5's "severe old men" or attacking more openly like c. 16's Furius and Aurelius.

In this connection, we may say that c. 22's reader of Suffenus's verses, Catullus himself, seems at pains to avoid precisely the sort of misreading of his own poetry and person he pilloried in c. 16. For Catullus distinguishes, early and clearly, between Suffenus as a person (he is "charming" and "urbane," *uenustus* and *urbanus*), even a language user (he is "well spoken," *dicax*), and as a "poet," that is, as the speaking subject of his poem. Since, as we will see, even the composing poet is protected, kept distinct from the speaking subject, only that last "Suffenus," least real and most fictional, comes in for clearly negative criticism. By contrast, the real, historical person is praised, in terms of obvious importance in Catullus's poetics and in the language of social performance more generally.

Just as in c. 16, then, so in c. 22 may poems be criticized while their poet is more positively appraised. This confirms our impression that an interest in best reading practices is an important part of Catullus's poetics; this will be confirmed further by c. 36, discussed later in this chapter. In the meantime, we may say that Catullus's fine distinctions among poet, poems, and poetry allows him to develop further a sense of reading as a *social* practice, involving relationships among texts and people, insofar as he may criticize and sympathize simultaneously. The contrast between Suffenus's elegant person and his uncountably many, materially elegant poems is indeed superficially useful to Catullus as the "occasion" out of whose silence he may speak his own poetry. But at a deeper level c. 22 suggests that the two men have more in common with each other as people of similar interests in a shared society than they do as artisans of different accomplishments in a shared medium. At this level, discussion of poetry is valued less than are the social interactions that such discussion requires and that poems, as objects available for our consideration, may serve to figure.

WHAT CATULLUS KEEPS QUIET (ABOUT HIMSELF) BY SPEAKING
(ABOUT SUFFENUS AND US ALL)

C. 22's superficially negative evaluation of Suffenus's poetry ironically conceals Catullus's deeper sympathies with the poet himself, that is, with the man as a fellow person. As we seek to understand more deeply how a poetics of silence relates to such interaction and evaluation in a society, we may say further that Catullus's criticism of Suffenus's work must depend for its utterance on a certain silence. Of course, Suffenus himself does not speak. But I would suggest that, as in c. 16, neither in a

way does Catullus. Perhaps more precisely, while Catullus does speak about Suffenus, his own utterance breaks a sort of silence about him, telling another story without quite saying it aloud.

In particular I would suggest that, as a step from expressly negative evaluation toward explicit sympathy, c. 22 indicates—and therefore breaks—a sort of silence in which is kept the more sophisticated poet's jealousy of the lesser poetaster's simple joy. For after describing what is wrong with Suffenus's poetry, Catullus must admit that the man "is never so happy as when he's composing" (vv. 15–16: *neque idem umquam / aequae est beatus ac poema cum scribit*). Suffenus's happiness seems, in Catullus's view, honest and continuous. We note the present tense, which makes the action ongoing, and we may take the liberty of multiplying "happiness per poem" by Suffenus's unaccountably many lines to arrive at a huge product of pleasure.¹¹

In contrast to this enormous positive feeling, it is rather Catullus's negative evaluations that must seem small, even worthless. I believe that Catullus himself draws this conclusion and, as part of his poetics of silence, invites us to overhear it as an unvoiced concern. The immediately preceding criticism may seem to swagger confidently in its elegant form: "the man who just now / seemed such a wit, or something wittier than that: / he comes across hicker than a backwoods hick" (vv. 12–13: *qui modo scurra / aut si quid hac re scitius uidebatur, / idem infaceto est infacetior rure*). But the insult is overmatched. In contrast to Suffenus's unaffected joy at being a poet, Catullus's verbal artistry here seems contrived, even an overly obvious affectation. Its implicit appeal to standards of "urbanity" may sound forced, as if Catullus—seeking somehow to criticize a *clearly* "urbane" man as rustic—is himself too *deliberately* urbane and *therefore* more obviously the rustic.

In other words, Catullus's declaration is so highly polished that it cannot but suggest that he protests too much *and* that he knows it. We have encountered this sort of irony already; yet c. 22 seems to lack the humor associated with such ironic knowledge of failure in, for example, c. 10 (discussed briefly in chapter 1). In this connection, in c. 22 we are, I think, invited more quietly but also more sincerely to recall that Catullus was himself a country boy not in poetic figuration but in fact. Although far too wealthy to be anything like a "ditchdigger" or "milker of goats," he had relatively recently arrived in the city and so perhaps had integrated into its highest societies incompletely. The phrase "hicker than hick" (v. 14: *idem infaceto est infacetior rure*), so nicely turned, therefore risks turning on its maker: undeniably talented in poetry, Catullus

may yet be functionally peripheral to certain desirable societies. That he succeeded in “coming out” into a high society of cultured elites is indicated by, among other things, the fact that he is able to write insults against notable people with what was evidently some impunity, passing judgments without apparent fear of reprisal. But I would guess that part of the impunity came from Catullus having been judged irrelevant or harmless.

If this is right, then the phrase “hicker than hick” would seem particularly marked by its form for a self-consciously ironic reading. The Latin has a jingly feel to it. It also has so much the same form as a verse from c. 39, “for nothing is less inept than an inept smile” (v. 16: *nam risu inepto res ineptior nulla est*), that the one may productively be read in the context of the other.¹² In c. 39 the phrase scores a point against one Egnatius, whose brilliant white smile is flashed without proper understanding of occasion or social setting, for example, at funerals (vv. 4–6). But like the ending of c. 22, that dictum must be read as applying more generally: the problem is one of inappropriate behavior, a question of incomplete mastery of social protocol, an ineffectual cultural practice. Like Suffenus at first seems to be, Egnatius stands in for everyone who has not acquired the complex *savoir faire* that is required of right participation in *any* society and that was specified for elite, late Republican Roman circles by certain arbiters of taste. Catullus clearly hopes that he is among them. We have seen that the language of social performance plays an important role in his poetics, including in programmatic poems (cc. 1 and 116). And he makes the connection himself in c. 39 explicitly, saying that Egnatius’s “practice [is] neither elegant, as I judge it, nor urbane” (vv. 7–8: *hunc habet morbum, / neque elegantem, ut arbitror, neque urbanum*).¹³

But what if his hope is groundless, and he is wrong about his talent or taste? If we are right to hear this unvoiced question underlying c. 22’s outward speech, we may take the similarity of phrasings as suggesting a sort of transitive property in the criticism of social and cultural performance. Suffenus (*idem infaceto est . . .*) is implied to be like Egnatius (*nam risu inepto . . .*), and since Catullus is, as we all are, like Suffenus, therefore Catullus is like Egnatius. C. 22 would, then, tacitly invite us to consider whether Catullus is incompletely right, even gauche in what he himself takes to be sophisticated flair.

This reading seems strengthened by a further similarity to Egnatius: both men are provincial, Egnatius from Spain and Catullus from the Transpadanus. If it was a rare Roman *author*, at least as their works

have substantially survived, who came *from* the city of Rome, it seems that high society was composed more prominently of native urbanites or at least those with longer-standing ties to the city. Provincial origin is therefore linked, in the Roman cultural imaginary, to rusticity, and, certain poetic constructions of country life to the contrary, rusticity is not generally figured a virtue. Catullus, as might be expected, makes provincial origin a cause of Egnatius's inappropriate behavior more explicitly than it is applied, in his own poetry, to himself. Indeed he is at pains to distinguish his particular origin from Egnatius's, suggesting that "his own Transpadanes" do not share (vv. 13–14) the Celtiberians' alleged custom of brushing their teeth with urine (vv. 17–19). But just as Egnatius's brilliant, stupid smiling is, from this perspective, figured as a matter of barbaric provincial custom, so too might Catullus's poetry risk emphasizing his own provincialism not despite its author's exuberance but because of it, in particular because of his exuberant wit. Does he only ape the society's witty mores in a way that would strike true arbiters of taste as amateurish or grotesque? Does the sophisticated poet, too, show himself to be a sort of "social poetaster"? Part of the power of c. 22 lies in its insistence that Catullus, as his own Suffenus, is positioned exactly so as to be unable to know.

JUDGING POETRY AND POEMS IN SOCIETY

In this way, in a way intended to seem somewhat surprising or even discomfiting to the poet himself, c. 22 turns out to be interested in exploding any put-on airs: poets', this particular poet's, everybody's. The continual critical evaluation of performance in late Republican Roman society makes it seem as if everyone has only recently arrived and thus is at risk of performing poorly. In light of c. 22's interest in city and country, and c. 39's list of oxymoronic "urbane provinces," we may say that there is operative here a sort of geography or cartography of taste. With poetics of silence in mind, we may thus overhear not only a tacit jealousy of "natural" urbanity on the part of a poet more recently arrived but also a more deeply underlying feeling that everyone, really, lacks local knowledge, discrimination, the capacity for meaningful criticism, taste.¹⁴ Like Suffenus seeming to mistake quantity and outward form for inner quality, and like Egnatius thinking that drinking his own urine is an acceptable preparation for social interaction, Catullus is at risk of only thinking that he has got something right. Does refinement in linguistic form only seem to be meaningful? At a further extreme, with poet standing in for language user, is language or discourse in general

not truly meaningful, such that all sociocultural silences tend indeed toward the natural, absolute silence of death?

Part of the force of Catullus's poetry lies in its relative openness about this rich and problematic set of questions. As we have seen, certain poems ironically conceal or quietly give voice to the fact that meaning depends heavily on shifting standards of evaluation in society and culture.¹⁵ In Catullus's wonted society, to be able to mean something depends on a rare and precious charity: meaning exists in an economy of scarcity based on interpersonal interaction instead of commercial exchange and is therefore subject to changing emotions.¹⁶ This dependence of meaning, including poetic meaning, on the judgments of people in social interactions is, I would say, tacitly behind Catullus's sympathetic turn at the end of c. 22. As much as he is capable of criticizing out of his belief that he is a fine creator, he is also sophisticated and sensitive enough as a reader to know that his poetry, like anyone's, lives and breathes in human utterance and response. As a result, poetry as it exists in society has much to do with human silence.

I believe that Catullus himself drew this conclusion, for in poems like c. 22 I hear it undermining his confidence or, to put it more neutrally, deepening and complexifying his feelings. He is able to insist on his audience's participation at various points and in various tones: sometimes cajoling, sometimes violent, usually witty. But that "audience" consists of readers whose reading is of course the very voice and continuity of any poem and whose silence would be the poem's—all poetry's—permanent silence in turn. Catullus is, then, an expert imitator as well as a ventriloquist in part because he feels deeply the interdependence of voices that makes a poem, an utterance, possible. His is a social poetry, and as such the poet is not only able to take advantage of sociocultural silences but also subjected to social structures and cultural norms that are not completely under any individual's control, including Catullus's own.

For these reasons, and because he is aware of these reasons, a sophisticated, metapoetic critic like Catullus must look on a less sophisticated author with some longing: the latter has at least the good fortune of more simply loving what he does (and does and does . . .). By contrast, any positive feeling Catullus may have for his own work is complicated by the distance demanded by his irony: it seems to depend on desiring or disliking or otherwise fixating on what another person has done. It is striking that even those poems purporting to include expressions of his own most strongly felt emotions are often framed as responses to

another's actions.¹⁷ The poet speaks afterward, and a metapoetic poet is consequentially aware of his belatedness as well as his dependence on social interactions. In terms of a poetics of silence, in this context we may hear criticism, ostensibly directed outward, as concealing a tacit comment about the critic. His superiority is a matter of shifting position in society, and that in turn is a matter of others' judgments, over which the poet has only a limited sort of artistic control. The poet may respond, but as such he always speaks afterward; hopefully he does not also speak too late.

When, then, in c. 22 Catullus criticizes how Suffenus dresses up his doggerel excessively finely, we stand to hear a complex self-criticism, simultaneously sympathetic and jealous. Beyond even the poem's generalizing conclusion about the blindness we all have with regard to our faults, Catullus knows that in particular he may seem to do exactly as Suffenus does.¹⁸ In so many words, he does not "publish" his poems quite so extravagantly: his description of his *libellus* as "newly smoothed with a dry pumice stone" (1.2: *arida modo pumice expolitum*) is, in comparison to Suffenus's reportedly elaborate and expensive materials (22.6–8), restrained in its pride about appearance; as discussed in chapter 1, it is also arguably figurative for the Callimachean poetics that would discount Suffenus's prolific production as excessive. But of course the two poets' *corpora* are, despite their differences, linked by similarly artistic application of "book" technology. Catullus's *libellus* being "smoothed with a dry pumice stone" is matched by Suffenus's lines "all smoothed by a pumice stone" (22.8: *pumice omnia aequata*).¹⁹ If Suffenus's interest in polish symbolizes his mistaken appreciation of his own poetry, then so might Catullus's. It is, moreover, a small metaphorical extension indeed to say that Catullus clothes not poems but, as we have seen in chapters 1 and 2, certain topics and feelings in fancier garb than their banality or vulgarity would seem to deserve.²⁰

Material Poems and Absent Friends: Listening to C. 50

Thus far, c. 22 has allowed us to see how poems and criticism of poems serve to signify relations in society as well as shared cultural practices. As different as Catullus may wish himself and Suffenus to be from each other, each shares with the other an appreciation of his own poetry. This is symbolized by, among other things, an interest in the materials that go into "publication" of poems. As physical objects, poems may

be transferred or circulated within social networks, and of course their materials have properties and associations of their own. As a result, the signification effected by poems as objects within social networks is both indexical and symbolic: indexical insofar as the poems are contiguous to the networks in which they are moved; and symbolic insofar as their materials and other physical qualities may conveniently and suggestively stand in for certain aspects of those networks as well as their “nodes,” the people involved.²¹ In the context of a poetics of silence, all of this allows poems to “say” more, to mean more, than their language alone would seem to allow. In addition to their topics, and going beyond even what they ironically conceal, poems as objects of exchange are suggestive of the nature of just such exchange.

We will see an especially charged figuration of poems as objects in social relations in c. 36. In the meantime, by way of transition and to allow us to round out discussion of c. 22’s ethical or philosophical implications, we may confirm our impression of how poems as objects in social interaction are important to Catullus by briefly reconsidering in this context c. 50. As we saw in chapter 1, c. 50 has Catullus remembering a moment of poetic composition shared with Calvus “yesterday” or “before”; his memory is filtered through the experience of solitary composition “today” or “now.”²² In what we have seen is a typical kind of irony, then, by referring to poetry c. 50 calls attention to its own status as a poem. Just possibly c. 50 is in fact the very “poem” Catullus claims there to have made for Calvus (so that the latter may perceive the former’s pain; vv. 16–17: *hoc, iucunde, tibi poema feci / ex quo perspiceres meum dolorem*). As noted in chapter 1, however, it is also possible that “this poem” refers to c. 51, with c. 50 serving as an introduction or “cover letter.”²³ Whether c. 50 or c. 51 is meant, the metapoetry is emphatic as well as pointed in our current context: c. 50 is linked to our main example of c. 22, for they are the only two poems in the Catullan corpus to use the word *poema*, “poem” (22.15 and .16, 50.16). It is striking that this key term occurs in both poems in the same line. No matter how much weight that coincidence may bear, we seem to have here additional “proof” of Catullus’s quiet identification with Suffenus; in his own private time as depicted in c. 50 (v. 16: *hoc . . . poema feci*), Catullus engages in the same activity that makes Suffenus happy in c. 22 (v. 16: *poema . . . scribit*).

The difference of course is that Catullus wishes to be overheard writing for Calvus, and in that man’s absence is pining and pained, whereas Suffenus seems to write for himself and so derives continual happiness

from his poetic composition (possibly including translation?). That difference notwithstanding, in both cases attention is drawn to poems as they signify social interactions (or lack thereof), while less attention is paid to the poems as we might expect them to be considered, that is, as language art. Although c. 22 purports to criticize Suffenus's verse, and although c. 50 might suggest a great pleasure in Calvus's artistry, neither offers any detail about the language of the poems involved. Instead both offer only the vaguest "readings," focusing on how the poems as objects in circulation signify their authors' social interactions and what we might call their particularly social qualities, that is, how their authors manage the language of social performance. In c. 50, Catullus's "poem" will thus make clear to Calvus, who knows Catullus as an eager, clever partner in poetry, how Catullus is pained by his friend's absence; otherwise going completely undescribed, the "poem" has only this social meaning. In c. 22, Suffenus's "poems" convey a meaning that is similarly social; they will make clear to Varus, who knows Suffenus as "charming, well-spoken, and urbane" (v. 2: *uenustus et dicax et urbanus*; emphasized at v. 9: *bellus ille et urbanus*), how Suffenus seems to have changed between being heard as a speaker and being read as a poet.

C. 22 and the Problem of Poetic Recollection

If the predicted effect on Varus is, one imagines, contrary to Suffenus's own purpose in writing, we have seen that such risk of misreading is inherent in Catullus's literary society. And yet we may say that, in the context of Catullus's poetics of silence, the risk is more general and more serious. Going beyond misinterpretation in and by a particular society, the risk of being misread is also that of going unheard, not specifically as a poet but more generally as a language user, even a being-in-language. When, as we have seen, so much of our "meaning" or being is not strictly linguistic but consists in silence, then in any setting that insists on language we are at risk of being unknown. Poetry as language art is thus problematic, even dangerous in insisting that language is what signifies. A Suffenus is saved from the worst of this by virtue of his simple pleasure in poetry and in poems' physical, material polish. A Catullus, claiming a more self-consciously sophisticated poetics, is more exposed. When poems are considered in their materiality, as objects for human exchange, they are manageable and may be made to mean as we would will. By contrast, when poems are "poetry," speak-

ing language out of their own impossible permanence and power, they would seem to outstrip our capacity to control.

In this way, Catullus's poetics of silence includes some consideration of a silence that might be said to bridge the gap between the sociocultural silences of his literary society and the natural, absolute silence of death. This intermediate sort of silence is, paradoxically, a negative aspect of poetry's traditionally positive claim to guarantee immortality in culture. Put generally, this negative aspect is how poetry may indeed offer such immortality indiscriminately, preserving even those things that might be unworthy or, worse, have had greater meaning if allowed to go unremembered. If poems as material objects may be made to play roles in, and to figure, social interaction, then poetry as an abstraction may be said by contrast to give a sort of unnatural life to meaning as it goes beyond the human world. In other words, poetry's capacity to preserve emphasizes the difference between a human desire, whether interpersonal or more generally social, that responds dynamically to time and the tendency of poetry to approach time statically, insisting on the perpetual present of its own being as utterance.²⁴

This leads to a problem in representation. Although Catullus's "occasional" poetry excels at seeming to represent moments in time, from a metapoetic perspective every poem is also a representation of itself as an utterance that is, ideally, continuously repeatable as the same. This sort of representation as a rule puts lived experience into artificial terms. Whether or not those terms are considered "unnatural," we could say that they are involved in causing unnatural deaths. As we have seen especially in chapter 2, a poem seems to insist on the silence of all potential speakers aside from the actual reader, who, however, may as well be unremembered for all that he or she does not speak other than as the poem's ideal speaker. This is the more disquieting in that poems are, of course, human creations; our own art and technology may disappoint or even turn on us.²⁵ As I have said, I believe that Catullus himself draws this conclusion in certain poems.

In this context, c. 22 and, as we will see, c. 36, may be read as suggesting, via ironic concealment and quiet disclosure, a more human path to be taken by poetry, and likewise a more humane or, at least, more congenial and less controlling criticism of social performance including language as it is essential to our being.²⁶ On this reading, an implication of c. 22's concluding sympathy in particular is that *only* sympathy, indeed only fellow feeling, stands a chance of countering poetry's necessary insistence on human silence as well as poets' and other language

users' complicity in systems of such preclusive discourse. In "such a gossipy society" (*tam maledica ciuitas*; Cic. *Cael.* 38) as late Republican Rome, and in the face of continual, assiduous evaluation of social performance, poems of this feeling quietly disclose a preference for congenial, truly mutual human society over pitiless systems of control. This preference would help to account for Catullus's interests not only in what is charming and witty but also in the witless or inept: as natural subjects of conversation because of their vulgar pleasure, they result in poems that are rather more obviously objects susceptible to human action.

A Preference for Human Interaction over Silence

More generally, then, we may say that in poems like these Catullus expresses a preference for human being, however artless, over the inhumanity of art. In terms of a poetics of silence, this would be a preference for utterance at hand, however uncharming or ordinary, over silence, however artful the poetry to which it might conduce. To return to the concrete details of c. 22, in this connection we may say that both Catullus and Suffenus are figured as working toward something truly human within the confines of sometimes-dehumanizing society and art. It is as if the two, despite their evident differences, are working together toward a common good. From this perspective, the poem's primary irony would not consist in the usual, somewhat superficial wit and charm but in a rather more thoughtful recovery of humanity from poetry and an unhelpfully critical literary society. On this reading, the seemingly straightforward description "the poet Suffenus" gives way to a more ironic description, attentive to change over time and to desire: "Suffenus, when he wishes to act like a poet." Thus the poem can assert both that Suffenus is very good at speaking (his "attractiveness," his being *uenustus*, is linked to his spoken language of the right kind, the urban[e] kind, *dicax et urbanus*: he is a "scathing wit" [Quintilian 6.3.21]) and that he is bad at writing poetry.

This is Catullus's point, so fine it is in danger of continually slipping by. The problem is not Suffenus's language but, again, the particular fact of poetry: its insistence that there is indeed such a thing as "better poetry" and, therefore, its impossible demands on poets. For how can it be that language, even elegant language, of the sort that marks a

lovely social interaction, is somehow not good enough for poetry? This question, which I take to be tacit in a poem like c. 22, is by way of observing that poetry involves what is indeed a burdensome imposition of silence, even or especially on the would-be better poet. C. 22 thus earns its famous concluding irony by juxtaposing Catullus as (self-estimated) superior poet to Catullus as, I would say, something of a philosopher of desirable sympathy and solidarity among fellow beings-in-language. Catullus, deeply ironic indeed, seems to have discovered that his irony requires him to question any critical distinction between himself and Sufferus on the basis of quality of poetry. Instead, they are rather more forcefully linked by their, our, shared foible. Taking the sting out of even acid criticism about quality, the shared fact of "being poets" or language users means, it seems, "being subjected to the judgment not only of a fashionable audience for poems but of poetry fashioning an audience for itself."

At a furthest extreme, we may hear in Catullus's unironizing sympathy for a fellow poet's situation a first, furtive inkling of the natural, absolute silence of death. C. 22 thus figures a harrowing contrast indeed: between poems, smaller poems, as sources and sites of human pleasure, on the one hand; and, on the other, poetry, larger to the point of sublimity, so large as to overpower pleasure as well as other vital aspects of human exchange. We are close here, then, to overhearing in Catullus an interest not only in ordinary silence, of the sort necessary to any utterance including poetry, but also in that singular silence toward which all others must seem to tend and for which they thus serve as symbols. In the next two chapters, we will see at length and in detail how Catullus responds to the silence of death.

In the meantime, we will confirm our impression that Catullus also makes something of the fact that, somewhat regardless of the theoretical status of poetry, in practice poems are read and otherwise handled by people. From this social perspective people are not "human beings," figured exclusively in their mortality, but "social beings" whose definition depends on their interactions not with abstract systems or forces but with one another. This social construction of experience helps to counter poetry's silencing power, at least within a given generation of readers if not over the generations.

Ironically, then, the same society that was figured as potentially threatening to the poet and his lover (cc. 5, 7) or actively critical of poets and others (cc. 16, 22) may be valued precisely for its wagging tongues

and talkative ways. When surrounded by speech, even the philosophical poet may feel, if perhaps only at moments, that not only poetry gets to speak. A main example of this already has been c. 6, discussed in chapter 1. For a second, more fully conversational example, we turn now to c. 36.

C. 36 and the Recuperative Power of Ordinary Conversation

In its own right, c. 36 serves as a vivid example of how a poetics of silence allows Catullus to say a great deal through ironic concealment and quiet disclosure. Like c. 22, c. 36 figures poets as people in social and interpersonal interactions that are signified in turn by poems regarded not so much as language art but as concrete, material objects. A central question, then, is who gets to say what about poetry as one among many kinds of social performance. A resultant question is what that says about them, that is, with what effects on their social or interpersonal standing. With these questions at its center, c. 36 does not offer the same sort of serious, generalizing conclusion as c. 22, hewing rather more closely and as it happens uproariously to the individuals and relationships involved. Insofar as it relates certain sociocultural and natural silences, however, the latter including physical destruction of poetry, c. 36 yet allows us to take another step, alongside Catullus, toward seeing how even such a sociocultural silence as a pause in conversation or an allusively concealed opinion may be understood as evoking the natural silence of death.

Annals of Volusius, shitty sheets,
 fulfill a vow on my girlfriend's behalf.
 For she has vowed to holy Venus and to Cupid
 that, if I should be returned to her
 and leave off brandishing savage iambs, 5
 she will dedicate the choicest writings
 of the worst poet to the slow-footed god
 to be kindled up by ill-favoring logs.
 And this, as she—the worst girlfriend—sees it,
 is her funny and charming vow to the gods. 10
 Now, you, created from the sky-blue sea,
 who cultivate holy Idalion and the open Urii
 and Ancona and sandy Cnidus
 and Amathun and the Golgi

and Dyrrachium, the Adriatic's tavern, 15
 make it that the vow is accepted and received,
 if it is neither unwitty nor uncharming.
 But you, meanwhile, go into the fire,
 full of the countryside and its infelicities,
Annals of Volusius, shitty sheets. 20

Annales Volusi, cacata carta,
 uotum soluite pro mea puella.
 nam sanctae Veneri Cupidinique
 uouit, si sibi restitutus essem
 desissemque truces uibrare iambos, 5
 electissima pessimi poetae
 scripta tardipedi deo daturam
 infelicibus ustulanda lignis,
 et hoc pessima se puella uidit
 iocose lepide uouere diuis. 10
 nunc, o caeruleo creata ponto,
 quae sanctum Idalium Uriosque apertos
 quaeque Ancona Cnidumque harundinosam
 colis quaeque Amathunta quaeque Golgos
 quaeque Dyrrachium Hadriae tabernam, 15
 acceptum face redditumque uotum,
 si non illepidum neque inuenustum est.
 at uos interea uenite in ignem,
 pleni ruris et inficetiarum
Annales Volusi, cacata carta. 20

As in other poems we have considered (cc. 1, 5, 7, 22, 50), so here does Catullus raise questions of quality, quantity, and material being in relation to poetry. There is of course also irony, but in contrast to what we have detected in c. 22, the mode is much less destabilizing. For c. 36 goes further even than c. 22 in limiting its attention to poems as physical objects that are available for circulation, as well as other actions in social networks, and are therefore susceptible to judgment. In turn, such judgment is a matter for enjoyment, even jocularity, including the light vulgarity and undemanding wordplay that so typically characterize interaction among (ostensible) peers.

C. 36 thus offers an image not of "poetry" and its (im)mortalizing powers in the abstract but of "poems" as such, poems as concrete things. In this image, poems constitute only one among many kinds of tokens for circulation and exchange in society. In this way poems are comprehensible—literally and figuratively graspable—and I would say

therefore completely unthreatening: in c. 36 there seems to be relatively little actual risk involved.²⁷ In the context of a poetics of silence, this figuration of poems as more or less exclusively concrete and therefore manageable suggests that such an interpersonal, social human action as discussion of poems may seem to counter the feeling that natural silence awaits us. In other words, c. 36 draws on the fact that a physical poem, even a collection of poems, may be mastered: if not understood then at least done with as the reader wishes, including undone. This would seem to be true especially for poems or *libelli* of Catullus's preferred small size. Although these are prized for being allusive and therefore somewhat elusive, their small physical size would seem to make them literally more manageable, whereas longer works like Cornelius's *Annals* (c. 1), lampooned in part for being too serious (v. 7: *laboriosis*), could also quite literally be harder to handle.²⁸ But the feeling applies fairly generally. As concrete, material objects, poems are human "makings" that the reader may do with as he or she wishes.

DESTRUCTION BY FIRE AND THE QUESTION OF TASTE: C. 36 AS
A READING LESSON

The point of c. 36, of course, is that at least one reader's wish is to destroy certain poems. The means is to be fire. The only question is which "writings [one] will give to the slow-footed god, to be kindled up by ill-favoring logs" (vv. 7–8: *scripta tardipedi deo daturam / infelicibus ustulanda lignis*). The diction is elevated, and the manner of reference elegantly oblique: "the slow-footed god" is an elaborate way of referring to Vulcan, who in his turn is metonymous for the "fire" that is not named but present, in the following line, only as the implicit cause of explicit physical effects.

This first reading risks making of the act of destruction something more serious than Catullus seems to intend here. I would say that c. 36 is, for example, not a veiled image or allegory for concern about censorship or an argument for or against iconoclasm, the destruction of art.²⁹ Standards in art are certainly at stake in the poem. Like other poems we have considered, c. 36 rather comes out against what the poet feels is a certain lack of sophistication, a philistinism, here regarding poetry. Catullus's girlfriend is reckoned a relatively poor judge of what I would like to call, anticipating the argument immediately following, "poetic character."³⁰ Perhaps not surprisingly in his own witty poem, the poet himself is implied to have better taste.

But this description, too, would, I think, be too serious, too earnestly

metapoetic. For Catullus's point is not so much that his girlfriend has, like Furius and Aurelius in c. 16, misread poems. Rather she has, in her own more loosely "poetic" right as a language user, missed or mis-handled a chance for charm and wit. Catullus feels that she has taken insufficient advantage of an opportunity to display precisely that undemanding but clever wordplay, perhaps including light vulgarity, which in his view is the very seasoning—the salt and good humor (16. 7)—of urbane social interaction. In line with that desirable tone, and absent a generalizing ethical conclusion, c. 36 may be read as a joke, and one long, punning, metapoetic joke at that.

The girlfriend thinks that she has made a good joke about poetic character: "as she sees it, she makes a funny, witty vow to the gods" (vv. 9–10: *se puella uidit / iocose lepide uouere diuis*). But like Suffenus in c. 22, she is mistaken, at least so far as the composing poet is concerned. Catullus's feeling is, moreover, sharpened in that, unlike in c. 22, here we do not have the po(e)t calling the kettle black, realizing it, and regretting it aloud in sympathetic recognition of a shared situation. In c. 36 there is no question of the target and the poet sharing the same incapacity: the girlfriend is less clever while Catullus is more clever precisely about poetic character and the opportunity for witty speech or poetry.

In his view, the proper aim of such utterance is not, as he reports the girlfriend to have had it, a description of fact but, as the current poem embodies it, a fiction whose license is perhaps the greatest pleasure of social interaction among peers of certain cultural elevation and education (as we have seen in poems considered in chapters 1 and 2). In particular, the girlfriend has thought of poetic character as referring, unironically, to the actual person of the poet: her joke is that saying "worst poet" is enough to indicate Catullus, whose poems, "the most-representative writings of the worst poet," she thus intends to burn (vv. 6–7: *electissima pessimi poetae / scripta*, continuing as quoted earlier). This uses a kind of irony, in that her speech is figured: she does not say overtly, "It's you, Catullus." But still her speech is, in ancient terms, somewhat nearer to *palam*, spoken "bluntly," than *aperte*, spoken "clearly for the right listeners"; in this way she manages only an ordinary sort of irony. Her reference to Catullus is only a thin veil away from the tedious personal attack attributed to Furius and Aurelius in c. 16. By contrast, Catullus makes a better joke by offering a reading that is equally clearly "mistaken" but also cleverer. Whereas the girlfriend, or really anybody, is capable of indicating an actual interlocutor without naming him, it takes a

greater wit to construe “poetic character” as pointing to a distant poet. In this case of course Catullus names Volusius.

In other words, we may say that Catullus’s joke is better in that the mode of his own, deliberate “misreading,” his misconstrual of his girlfriend’s ambiguously phrased vow, ironically and paradoxically indicates his greater capacity for discriminating reading. Catullus is funnier, in a way “naturally,” because he has better taste and so may finely distinguish between personal dislike and professional discrimination. Poetic character thus encompasses both “the character of the poet” and “the character of the poetry,” but—here as in crucial poems like c. 16 and c. 116—in Catullus’s poetics they are not the same. In c. 36, the character of the poet and the character of the poetry are cagily overlapped and, by the poet of demonstrably better character as a reader, disentangled as in a witty reading lesson.³¹

IGNORING “POETRY” TO FOCUS ON “POEMS”

In the context of our ongoing investigation of poems and silence in social interaction, a striking feature of c. 36’s witty metapoetry is how any poetry as such is mostly ignored. Neither the girlfriend, as her vow is reported here, nor the poet in his own superior speech pays attention to the details of any poem. This sort of silence, in which poetry as such in the form of language is ignored, while poems as such are evoked as physical objects, seems systematic in c. 36.

In historical order, the first poetic object of this poem’s attention are some other poems by Catullus. They are described as “savage iambs” (*truces . . . iambos*), and he is implied to have been “brandishing” them (*uibrare*, as one would threaten with a spear; both v. 5) in a performance of hypermasculine bravado that is, from the girlfriend’s perspective, evidently tedious.³² “Savage” may suggest a crass imagery, and we may imagine her rolling her eyes as she asks him, more or less, to grow up. As Catullus’s report of her language puts it, she asks that he “be returned to her,” in the negative leaving off such poems, in the positive perhaps (again?) writing more delicate or affectionate poems (vv. 4–5: *si sibi restitutus essem / desissemque truces uibrare iambos*). We do not know which if any of the existing “iambs” in the collection are intended here; some would seem to fit the bill.³³ But c. 36 works independently of any particular poems, depending instead on our seeing, simply, that the girlfriend makes her dislike, be it sincere or performative in itself, of certain poems or sorts of poems known.

In other words, what matters, then, is that the poems enter into the

picture only as the proximate cause of the exchange or, really, as props arranged against a background for interpersonal relation and, as the story goes on, more general social interaction. Catullus's "iambics" are not so much "poetry" here, in the sense of language composed so as to be read aloud as such, as they symbolize the very "here," the social space, that the interlocutors may occupy in the first place. In this way poems as concrete objects are a sort of pretext or excuse for interpersonal and social interaction. From this perspective, c. 36's attention to poems as they are written mainly refers to something more than or other than their content.

A similar distinction between "poetry as language" and "poems as physical objects" may be drawn with respect to the second set of writings, Volusius's *Annals*. These are not discussed at any length or depth but are quickly characterized so as to seem a plausible, even natural, candidate for "the most-representative writings of the worst poet." Like Suffenus's poems in c. 22, Volusius's *Annals* are "full of the countryside and [its] infelicities"; that comparison is explicit, with the language of c. 36 (v. 19: *pleni ruris et inficetiarum*) recalling c. 22 (v. 14: *idem infaceto est infacetiore rure*). Perhaps Volusius's poetry is also excessively long? There is no other explicit criticism here, although it may be implied that the *Annals*, on the analogy of Cornelius's large, annalistic universal history in c. 1, are excessively labored. Volusius's poems feature here mainly insofar as they are, in Catullus's view, appropriate replacements for his own "iambics" in the girlfriend's vow. Even more than those "iambics," these *Annals* are clearly not invoked for anything like an interest in their linguistic details. As "writings," they are not scripts for reading aloud but rather, expressly, scraps for burning: "you, meanwhile, go into the fire, / full as you are of the countryside and its infelicities, / *Annals* of Volusius, shitty sheets" (vv. 18–20: *at uos interea uenite in ignem, / pleni ruris et inficetiarum, / Annales Volusi, cacata carta*).³⁴

IGNORING POEMS TO FOCUS ON PEOPLE

We may say that in these sorts of poems, a consequence of poetry being silenced is that (tacit) feelings about people as well as facts of interpersonal interaction are expressed. If that expression is not always at outrageous volume, as in c. 6 or other poems breaking sexualized silences, then it takes shape as a kind of ironically open concealment or quiet disclosure. All these modes of expression are witty modalities made meaningful in a poetics of silence. In c. 36, the means to poetry's silence is of course burning. Importantly, then, poems are fit to be silenced by

burning not only because of their quality as poetry but also because of their inscription onto flammable paper. In this way, those poems' legibility, a condition of their being permanently available for recitation, is also their capacity for being burnt, a precondition or even a primary cause of their being lost.

In this connection it is worth emphasizing that in c. 36 there is no abstract question of the poetry's destruction as ridding the world, for good or ill, of truly unacceptable or truly important poetry. Indeed, I would say that "destruction" is all too serious a term for such a specifically interpersonal sacrifice.³⁵ In this way c. 36 is unlike c. 1, where conversation is staged between two writers about their writing, but like c. 50, where a thematically similar conversation is, as we have seen, put more completely in the service of signifying personal affection. C. 36 is thus also similar to c. 22, whose own attention to poems is, as we have also seen, a sort of pretext for the expression of complex emotions arising out of and returning to human interaction, above all fellow feeling or sympathy with people.

In brief, c. 36 does not figure itself as taking place between two or more poets, or even between learned readers of poetry, as a function of their interest in poems. Instead it represents two or more people for whom poems, and material conditions, symbolize preexisting interpersonal connections. We may therefore say again that, in some contrast to c. 22, c. 36 steps back from a brink teetered at by the thoughtful poet. The poem thus serves to complement, or even to counter, the poet's feeling that, in the abstract and in the long term, poetry threatens to overpower human utterance with its own insistence on accommodating silence. For c. 36 offers the recognition that, in daily life, poems as material objects are matters of human action and judgment.

C. 36 thus figures an interest in the relation between poetic genres and social or cultural practices as they are areas for tradition and innovation. The girlfriend wishes for an end to what we may easily imagine is ceaseless poetasting of a low-grade juvenility (Catullus's "iambics," especially if poems like cc. 25 and 29 are any indication of what she has in mind). This wish or desire for a kind of silence is used by Catullus—in a way we have seen reiterated in several poems now—as a convenient occasion to tell his own story; in this case, Catullus responds, and thus fills the silence that is the pause after the girlfriend's vow, by averring his own more sophisticated taste in the form of what is implicitly marked as better poetry. At least two judgments of poetry or language are ranged against each other so as to be judged in turn. It bears empha-

sizing, to continue the contrast with c. 22, that these fine discriminations are about judgments and other actions as they are performed by human agents. In this way Catullus focuses on “people” as they are figured in ordinary relation to one another, not as they are ranged against poetry or another superhuman force and so found wanting as “human beings.” The silences at stake are sociocultural, and as such they might be overcome.

THE GIRLFRIEND’S VOW AS ATTEMPT AT
SOCIAL PERFORMANCE

Although these late Republican Roman people are, as noted, in shifting and fiercely contested relations with one another, in a poem like c. 36 Catullus draws attention to what should be a source of fellow feeling. This is their shared, absolute power over something like poetry, a cultural product whose grandiose claims are, it bears emphasizing, subject to human judgment. Imagined as a kind of competitive game, such social interaction is non-zero-sum or, at least, not time limited, such that the purported immortality of something like poetry is immaterial, or important only if it be judged to help one social agent win points against another.³⁶ By focusing on the physical or material being of poems, their fragility and particular capacity to be burnt, c. 36 may be read as exemplifying how a poetics of silence may reclaim poetry for people by treating it properly as a sign for social interaction.

That c. 36 is, as I have called it, a thoroughly human poem is emphasized not only by how “poetry” is silenced but also by how the gods are treated. When the poem turns, as we will consider in some detail, from describing the girlfriend’s (mock-?)spiteful vow to enacting the poet’s own more clever dedication in fulfillment of that vow, the divine is elaborately referred to but not really summoned. Vulcan and Venus (and Cupid) are not so much present as represented; attention is drawn away from the possibility of epiphany to the representations. Any serious interest in divinity is lost to the human question of whether the girlfriend or the poet is the more skillful representer.³⁷ In this way c. 36 develops an image similar to c. 50’s, in which the poet plays a pleasingly piquant social game with peers. Something as powerful as poetry, and beings as powerful as the gods, are of interest primarily as symbols of human interaction and exchange.

The more specific that interaction is to the people involved, in other words the more a resultant poem reveals about their tacit understandings and stories kept quiet, the better its poetic effect in view of Catullus’s

poetics of silence. For this reason, c. 36 is more uproariously funny than c. 22's wry and self-reflective fable, although like c. 22 it, too, is located at a turning point: the point in conversation where the girlfriend has finished her vow and Catullus can fill the silence. The girlfriend's vow is intended to score a humorous point at Catullus's expense, but in his view it is rather his own joke that counts as "not uncharming and unwitty" (v. 16: *non illepidum neque inuenustum*). The verbal parallels with important moments of evaluation in poems including c. 10 (v. 4: *non sane illepidum neque inuenustum*, "certainly not uncharming or undesirable"), c. 6 (v. 2: *ni sint illepidae atque inelegantes*, "if they were not uncharming and inelegant"), and c. 1 (v. 1: *lepidum nouum libellum*, "a charming, new booklet") are proof that Catullus identifies himself fully as the wittier and more fashionable partner in this exchange.

But proof of the punning must be in the writing, and it is in c. 36's parody of a very different genre's conventions that this poem succeeds in its own terms. Whereas the girlfriend has employed a genre to what is, in Catullus's view, somewhat obvious effect, Catullus appears at his seemingly offhand best in his own carefully exaggerated aping of that same genre. This is the vow to a deity, including a ritual evocation of the deity's attributes and biography as relevant to the vow. By filling the silence in conversation with parody, Catullus seeks to exhibit his better taste and capacity for poetry. Although this one-up(wo)manship need not be serious, it is consequential: Catullus shows that he knows how to play, whereas both the girlfriend and a potential poetic "rival" do not.

The girlfriend's vow is given ample space: it is referred to obliquely in the second line, itself occupies the six succeeding lines, and Catullus's editorial comment takes up two more, for a total of nine out of the poem's twenty lines, or 45 percent of the whole. Add to this the first and last line being the same, and the relative proportion of the poem devoted to the girlfriend's expression of devotion is even higher. The tone seems mock-serious. The vow itself (vv. 3–10) is full of auditory and literary effects. Just before the juxtaposed superlatives of v. 6, "the choicest writings of the worst poet" (v. 6: *electissima pessimi poetae / scripta*), a kind of superlatum is already signaled by the sound of the two pluperfect subjunctives in the protasis of the conditional, "if I should be returned to her" (v. 4: *si sibi restitutus essem*) and "if I should leave off" (v. 5: *desissemque*). This internal rhyme, assisted by strong assonance, knits the three lines tightly together, making something poetic of the vow or, failing that, Catullus's representation of it. It is as if Catullus, al-

ready in his representation of the girlfriend's vow, is asserting his verbal superiority, even absolute superiority as implied by the superlatives.³⁸

Part of the joke, of course, is that while it would be no great thing to be "the worst poet," or to consider the "choicest writings" of that poet, at the very least one ought to make the identification correctly. Better than that would be to do what Catullus does, namely, make the vow in more elegant verse. It may be that we are to understand Catullus's vow as recasting a vow made by the girlfriend in verse to begin with.³⁹ In any case, Catullus clearly intends his own poem to seem superior. For this reason among others the girlfriend is called "worst": not only her judgment of poetic character but also, possibly, her own poetic language is flawed, in ways that are—again, like Furius's and Aurelius's mistaken reading in c. 16—useful to Catullus. From his perspective, it is therefore the more ludicrous that she believes that she has made a charming joke indeed: she "sees herself, [although?] the worst girlfriend, as vowing this to the gods in a way that is funny and charming" (v. 9–10: *hoc pessima se puella uidit / iocose lepide uouere diuis*).

PARODYING A POOR SOCIAL PERFORMANCE, 1: CATULLUS'S
AMBIGUOUS VENUS

At that midpoint of c. 36, one might suggest a rhetorical question mark, so as to capture better this moment of mock-serious "turn" in the "conversation": "And *this* she sees as her funny and charming vow to the gods?" With the tone thus signaled clearly, Catullus would be positioned to issue by way of rejoinder a vow that is *truly* funny and charming. The underlying sentiment is, "Let me show you how it's done." Likewise, we may imagine the slightest dramatic pause between vv. 10 and 11, as Catullus moves from passing judgment on the girlfriend's vow, through drawing that crucial breath (it is required for the hot-air utterance to come), to letting loose with what a joking vow in his view ought to be.

However we punctuate or imagine the action of the conversation staged, what a mock-serious and, no less, elegant vow that Catullus offers, indeed. Vv. 11–17 comprise a tour de force metricization of epithets in a way characteristic of Hellenistic poetry, illustrating the range of which Catullus's favored "hendecasyllabic" meter is capable.⁴⁰ In Catullus's hands, the same meter was able to report the girlfriend's vow as comparatively straightforward. In contrast to her brief reported dedication to "holy Venus and to Cupid," Catullus develops his own

invocation, ostensibly at this very moment (it happens “now,” *nunc*) as follows.

He describes the goddess in allusive detail (vv. 11–15). Although Catullus’s invocation, too, is to Venus, it is worth noting that she comes to his lips without Cupid attached, although Cupid might be implied after the earlier hendiadys (*Veneri Cupidinique*). More importantly, Catullus does not name her directly, instead letting the list of place- and people-names call her up allusively. This mode of representation already distinguishes Catullus’s vow as more sophisticated than the girlfriend’s, even as it takes up directly where her joke has left off. By making more extensive use of the ambiguity, Catullus structures his vow according to his Callimachean aesthetic, prizing the less directly referential. How plain, even unsmart, by contrast was the girlfriend to indicate Catullus so obviously!

At the same time, the elaborate deployment of place- and people-names in Catullus’s vow should, I would say, be read as parodic, in the service of an extended riff on the double entendres present in the girlfriend’s vow.⁴¹ Catullus’s list is marked by parallel transitions: geographically, from Venus’s snowy heights at Idalion to the sea-level city of Dyrrachium; and climatically, from the cold and snow to the warmer sands and water. Perhaps most importantly for its resonance with the rest of the poem, there is an apparent transition in reference to sexuality, covering allusive, even learned reference as well as reference that is more overt and rather less polite. Catullus’s vow thus begins by suggesting Venus’s celebrated sexuality only obliquely. She is described as “created from the sky-blue sea” (v. 11: *caeruleo creata ponto*); the phrase is vivid but, on its surface at least, relatively pure.⁴² This description comes close to serving as a Latin calque on the goddess’s Greek name, Aphrodite, one of whose most accepted meanings in antiquity was “born from [sea] foam” (“foam” in Greek being ἀφρός).⁴³ On its surface, then, “created from the sky-blue sea” may be read as imagining Venus as she was created thus, *without* the usual precondition of sexual union.

Below the surface, however, the phrase alludes to a particular version of Venus’s creation that is sexual indeed, offering an image of reproductive sexuality that is primal, in a way prior to and uncontrolled by cultural mores. In this version of her creation, Venus was born from the foam of the sea as that medium had been “inseminated” by the severed genitals of Uranus (in the Greek, Ouranos), the pre-Olympian god of the sky castrated by his own son and, perforce, successor Saturn (Kronos). This version of Venus was distinguished, at least notionally

if not in cult practice, from Venus born to Jupiter (in the Greek, Zeus), son of Saturn, and Dione. In Platonic, Neoplatonic, and later derivative Christian traditions, the Venus born to Uranus (Venus Urania) represents love for the heavenly ("uranian") or divine, while the Venus born to Jupiter and Dione (Venus Pandemos, "of all the people") represents merely physical love or sex as it does not lead toward communion with the divine.⁴⁴

There is thus an ambiguity in Catullus's phrase "created from the sky-blue sea." Does he mean to allude to that moment of creation as it combines sexuality and violence done to the father or, failing that kinship role, to the male reproductive partner? If so, the goddess is invoked as she may be said to "predat[e] the sublimation of primal needs/urges to socialisation."⁴⁵ On this reading her appearance in the poem would signal a strong, even uncontrollable sexuality indeed. On the other hand, Catullus may rather allude to "Venus Urania" as she was understood in Platonic traditions. It is possible that he knew of these, as they were well established in the literary tradition that preceded him.⁴⁶ On this second reading, Venus's appearance in the poem would signal an interest in love as it channels the physical or sexual toward the spiritual and divine.

While a reading of c. 36 as evoking a sort of Platonic Venus would, I think, be somewhat more difficult to maintain in light of how the poem proceeds, the ambiguity may be strictly undecidable. Whether or not this is deliberate on the part of the poet, it stands to enrich our developing reading of the poem. Catullus's invocation of an ambiguous Venus has consequences for the girlfriend, his own (erstwhile?) partner in love, that are likewise ambivalent or even contradictory if maintained simultaneously. On the first reading, the girlfriend would be associated with a feminine force arising from castration. Literally an emasculation, this would figure a certain "unmanning," even impotence (see the discussion later in this chapter).⁴⁷ In the myth it is also directly linked to the creation of love, which is productive in turn as a subject of many of Catullus's poems. On the second reading, the girlfriend would be associated with physical love and sexual reproduction more directly. But while this could seem to lead to the same productive place for poetry, as we have seen, in c. 36 there is at least the joking suggestion that Catullus and his girlfriend are "separated": she has asked that he "be returned to her," and her request that he stop writing "savage iambics" may suggest that he has left off writing love poems in particular.

The possibility that there is trouble in paradise is enhanced slightly

later, when Catullus may be read as linking, precisely and paradoxically, his “Uranian Venus” to prostitution. C. 36 is most overt, and least polite, in its mode of reference to sexuality at its end, where Dyrrachium is described as “the Adriatic’s tavern” (v. 15: *Durrachium Hadriae tabernam*). As Thomson puts it, this “is not far from speaking of it as a bawdy-house for sailors.”⁴⁸ Is it implied here, as is made explicit in other poems, that Catullus figures his girlfriend as a prostitute, and “love” or “sex”—the purview of Venus—more generally as merely prostitution? There is no easy way out of the ambiguities that pervade c. 36’s invocation of Venus. So much the better for Catullus’s poetic superiority that he produces a poem of such protean ambiguity in its allusivity, one that invites questions—or provokes indignant reactions—while keeping any answers quiet.

PARODYING A POOR SOCIAL PERFORMANCE, 2: THE
GIRLFRIEND AND VOLUSIUS

Before pursuing the poem’s transitions, especially in sexuality, and ambiguities further, we may note, with an ear to Catullus’s vivid sense-perceptual descriptions, that all these transitions together (sexual, geographical, climatic) suggest an intensifying odor. The poem moves from the implication of breezy sea, through the warmer and saltier, not to say ranker, aromas of the shore, to what must have been a truly briny, salty, sweaty, literally sexy, and fecal odor of the cesspit that was the seaport town. In this connection, it matters that the poem is framed by the odor of burning feces. While this may well have been a relatively more common odor in late Republican Rome, we may wonder whether there is something particular to it in Catullus’s sense-perceptual poetics or, possibly, in his personal experience. Is this an odor that Catullus, originally from the country, would have known more intimately, perhaps embarrassingly, in the form of manure used as fertilizer as well as dried and burned as fuel? In support of this, we may note that the only even approximately substantive criticism of Volusius’s *Annals* offered in c. 36 is that they are “full of the countryside and its infelicities” (v. 19: *pleni ruris et inficetiarum*). Such disparagement is conventional to Catullus’s adopted society, in which the countryside is disdained in favor of the city.⁴⁹ But we may imagine a more complicated feeling behind it here because of Catullus’s place of birth and upbringing outside Rome.

All of that said, Catullus is, as we have seen in several poems, too sophisticated simply to call the kettle black. He is not one to think, if I may employ a vulgar phrase that is apt in this context, that his shit does

not stink. He knows that it does. With that knowledge in mind, he is able vividly to characterize Volusius's writings, and therefore the girlfriend's taste, as the worst of their respective kinds.⁵⁰ For whether or not there is a tension here between Catullus's relatively rustic upbringing and the urban(e) society to which he aspires, c. 36's framing by Volusius's *cacata carta* may be read as reinforcing the humanity of the poem's imagined world via metonymic attention to physiology. The poem acknowledges that more is produced in the human world than poetry; or perhaps poetry is to be identified with that malodorous, wasteful "more." In this world, nothing so rarefied and nonhumanly divine as a parthenogenetic Aphrodite may belong at all seriously; therefore her invocation is ambiguous indeed. She is a mock-up, set up and sent up so that she and the girlfriend together may be knocked down simultaneously. Much more at home in the world of c. 36 is the Venus who tutelates Dyrrachium, Venus as tawdry patron goddess of prostitution.

Like many of the poems we have discussed so far, then, c. 36 draws strength from articulating a particular sort of mixture, combining rarefied and sewerred, sacred and profane. In this connection, it matters that the god to whom the girlfriend would dedicate Catullus's poems, and to whom as a result Catullus dedicates Volusius's *Annals*, is Vulcan. Vulcan does more here, I think, than serve as a vivid metonym for fire. For he is Venus's husband, on whom she famously cheats with Mars, an affair in which they are caught *in flagrante delicto*. In the scene as it is usually staged, however, the last laugh is on Vulcan, cuckolded in this instance and already lamed anyway.⁵¹

We may wonder, then, whether the poem implies a problem, serious or not, in Catullus's sexual relationship with his girlfriend. The implication may be that the girlfriend's desire for Catullus to be returned to her is not about his taste for vicious iambs but about his sexual inadequacy. Has he not proven himself manly enough, or has he been outmanned by someone more warlike, a Victor as in c. 80 or—just possibly—a Volusius? We have noted all the V-names in this poem and so might imagine Volusius victorious. Just as possibly and perhaps more plausibly it could be that Catullus, who is himself really another V-name (Valerius), is Vulcan here, cuckolded but triumphant for having fashioned his trap of a poetic net.⁵²

The flipside of these questions, and the result of Catullus's flipping the girlfriend's vow back at her in superior language, is that we are asked to wonder about her, too. If Catullus and the girlfriend are analogized at all to Vulcan and Venus, which aspects predominate? Is there

here an oblique, possibly unserious, but, from the poem's perspective, plausible aspersion on the girlfriend's character? We have seen how c. 36's Venus is ambiguous, as well as how Dyrrachium is implied to be "the bawdy house of the Adriatic." An earlier commentator on Catullus, Fordyce, puts it with characteristically greater delicacy: "The cult of Venus, which is mentioned only here, is not surprising in a large seaport."⁵³ For Catullus to associate his girlfriend closely with *this* Venus may thus be tantamount to calling her a prostitute. The term from c. 36 that I have translated as "girlfriend," *puella*, generally "girl," allows this specialized meaning.⁵⁴ Pursuing the image of implied sexual relationships further, we may imagine the "girlfriend" revealing herself as having no particular loyalties to Catullus. This would be symbolized by her taste in poetry; as we have seen Catullus suggest, she shows insufficient discrimination.

Of course, we cannot know whether this reading corresponds to life as Catullus, the historical author, had been living it. In any case, however, c. 36 makes good on the capacity of poetry to fictionalize utterance out of seemingly factual personal experience. As in other poems, so here do we seem to overhear things that could actually have been said. With social interactions at stake, these are the sorts of things about which a sophisticated language user like the poet might wish to keep silent or use to break his silence. In terms of Catullus's poetics of silence, c. 36 focuses on freighted human relationships indeed. While structured around vows to the gods, one reported and the other enacted in the poem's "real time," c. 36 is far from serious about contractual obligations to the divine. Instead, as we have seen, it is interested in the fact of the vows making possible a verbal and poetic one-up(wo)manship. In this way, again, c. 36 may be read, alongside poems like c. 22 and c. 50, as attending rather to "poems" than to "poetry," that is, to poems as material objects susceptible to human action including circulation, judgment, and destruction. As such, poems serve to signify the social networks within which they are given meanings that are deep and varied but hardly metaphysical.

SOCIOCULTURAL SILENCE AND VOLUSIUS'S IRONIC IMMORTALITY

The "occasional" nature of c. 36 is convincing, but winkingly so. As a result, Catullus's vow is, as shown, not to be taken seriously as a vow but rather admired as a charming poeticization of a vow. Similarly, we should say that the poem's silences are not so much "natural," much

less metaphysical, as “sociocultural” and specifically interpersonal. Against a backdrop that is congenially, if competitively, conversational, the silences also seem not to be forceful impositions. The girlfriend does not seem to be quoted directly, but she has spoken or even read her own poetry aloud; although Catullus’s own poetry is, of course, preferred, this occasion is made possible by her utterance. She is not named, but neither is she actively suppressed. Instead she is acknowledged, kept actively in mind, so that she may overhear her own bettering by the best. The impression here is, then, of Catullus not so much imposing a silence as attempting to make something extraordinarily clever out of his perfectly ordinary turn in an ongoing conversation. C. 36 thus comes out of Catullus taking quick-witted advantage of a social and cultural silence that is so common as perhaps to seem hardly worthy of that name: the pause, while one’s partners in conversation try to catch their breath.

At something like a greater distance from that ongoing conversation, in a way given over longer since to silence, is Volusius. Although he is named, twice, it is only as author and owner of writing fit for wiping away feces and then burning. But even this, while vivid, is hardly vicious or violent to the person, who lingers on in the form of his “transcribed” or “dictated” speech (*scripta*). This is immortality in culture or undying fame, albeit of a very low sort, indeed, and complicated by the poems’ materiality, their fragility and capacity for being burnt. But in c. 36 none of that seems to be a topic of serious investigation. It would, moreover, be a mistake to think that just any low-quality (“shitty”) writing would serve the poem’s purpose just as well; instead there is something quietly singular about Volusius’s. Even if we do not imagine an affair between the girlfriend and Volusius, a first implication must be that Catullus and his readers have read enough of the *Annals*, and then remembered them sufficiently, for *this* part of the joke to have a point.

Although Catullus himself need not have read the *Annals*, it seems likely that he did. They are evaluated negatively also in c. 95, where their low quality is a matter of speedy but sloppy composition and bloated size, along what we could call Suffenian lines (Volusius is styled a “swollen Antimachus”; v. 10: *tumido . . . Antimacho*). This is in pointed contrast with the fastidiously high quality of the long-anticipated and long-labored but “small” (v. 9: *parua*) *Zmyrna* by the poet Cinna.⁵⁵ As *Zmyrna* had become a byword for “neoteric” poetic achievement, surely destined for immortality (v. 6: *Zmyrnam cana diu saecula peruoluent*), so do the *Annals* seem to be readily recognizable as a nadir of contemporary

poetic practice. Volusius's poems are so bad as to be unworthy even of the paper on which they are circulated.

The complication, however, from the perspective of a poet of Catullus's tastes, is that, in contrast to the famously difficult *Zmyrna*, the *Annals* seem more popular. This may be a damnation by faintest praise, but especially in connection with c. 22 it seems freighted as well with a kind of jealousy. To be clear, Catullus has nothing positive to say about the *Annals*. In c. 36, as we have seen, Volusius's *cacata carta* are fit only for burning, and so figured as mortal. In c. 95 their mortality is explicit: "they will perish by the side of the river Padua," evidently close to their birthplace and therefore unrenowned (v. 7: *Paduam morientur ad ipsam*).⁵⁶ Only their physical pages at least serve a purpose, be it ever so low and stinky, in "furnishing suits for fish" (v. 8: *laxas scombris saepe dabunt tunicas*).⁵⁷

We may, however, overhear just a bit of jealousy or sympathetic envy on Catullus's part toward Volusius and other writers, including the Hortensius mentioned also in c. 95 and Cornelius in c. 1. However turgid, bloated, or *cacati*, such authors are prolific and popular and therefore possibly securing their own immortalities in culture. All of Catullus's attention, moreover, means that the name of Volusius survives, even as his *Annals* have not. (By contrast, in one of the ironies in which ancient literary history abounds, Cinna's beloved *Zmyrna* was also not successful at outlasting the years.) Like the otherwise unknown Flavius of c. 6, the Volusius of cc. 36 and 95 is not completely silenced: he has avoided the absolute silence imposed by death in part ironically because his silencing by Catullus is perfectly ordinary, sociocultural, conversational. It is as if Volusius could have spoken next, and we are simply not positioned to hear him. Catullus, with his keen ear for silence, must know that this fate could just as easily befall him: replace "Padua" with "Verona" and Catullus is indeed not far from Volusius's situation.

HUMAN UTTERANCE AND SOCIOCULTURALLY SILENCED GODS

C. 36's silences are sociocultural at their ordinary best, the sort of silence that structures ordinary conversation and, no less than concrete poems, serves to signify interpersonal interaction. As with c. 22, so here I feel that the positive, preservative effect of attending to such silence is not against Catullus's wishes, however much any positive feeling would seem to contradict his negative evaluations. However much he may have disliked Volusius's poetry, or perhaps even despised a given writer as a person, I do not hear in his poems a desire to cause lasting

"erasure from memory," *damnatio memoriae*. It is rather as if Catullus has discovered that "poetry" as an abstraction can be silencing enough, and that as a result he and his fellow "human beings" are better figured as "people," in their relations to one another and not to that unanswerable force. The context being late Republican Rome, and the author being Catullus, those relations are often contentious or competitive, but still they would seem to let the best person win. By contrast, "poetry" as such demands a silence too profound, too strong, for any ordinary person to break. In chapters 4 and 5 we will see how this idea is taken to its logical conclusion, as silence imposed by poetry tends toward the natural, absolute silence of death.

In the meantime, we may round out our discussion of c. 36 by contrasting Volusius's minor "undying fame" with the treatment meted out to the poem's two ostensible dedicatee gods, Venus (along with Cupid) and Vulcan. As suggested, the gods seem to serve as mere tokens in a way that goes beyond even the exemplary reference to Volusius's reviled poems. Although a vow sworn to Venus is appropriate in a context of domestic or sexual dispute, as shown already she is imagined ambiguously and not personified. Catullus's tour de force invocation looks not directly and respectfully at the goddess but askance at her human devotee; the look may be somewhat leering, as the "girlfriend" is likened to a "prostitute" (both *puella*). And there is no question of Cupid being important in his own right here: he is more or less totally an aspect of Venus (*Veneri Cupidinique* is so close a conjunction as to be hendiadys, the two ostensibly separate elements treated as one). We could consider him an afterthought if only that did not impute too much status to Venus. Venus and Cupid, closely linked, are thus almost totally abstracted.

The abstraction is strengthened by comparison with c. 3, where "Venuses and Cupids," both in the plural, are told to "mourn, / alongside the mass of rather attractive human beings, / the death of [Catullus's] girlfriend's sparrow" (vv. 1–3: *Lugete, o Veneres Cupidinesque, / et quantum est hominum uenustiorum: / passer mortuus est meae puellae*).⁵⁸ There, the plurals imply such a close association between the gods' names and their jointly held domain of sexual relations that the former are merely metonymic for the latter. Just as there is, as Catullus has begun to experience, a large number and a wide range of sexual or otherwise erotic activities, so are there multiple and various Venuses and Cupids. A bit of wordplay would seem to confirm this. In the Latin, "Venus(es)" and "attractive" share the same root, *uen-*, such that the divine and human

worlds overlap, at least in that the latter's "rather attractive" examples may be described as sense-perceptibly similar to the former. As in c. 36, so in c. 3 (alongside c. 2) the issue may be a mismatch between Catullus's own sexual desires and the desires, or the actions, of his lover.⁵⁹ Regardless, the goddess and her son are domesticated, brought into the poem because previously and routinely brought into the bedroom. The impression is of a market in, literally, aphrodisiacs ("Aphrodite stuff").⁶⁰ There is little to no ennobling feeling, much less a sublimely divine feeling.

Finally, Vulcan is treated similarly. We have discussed briefly the story of his and Venus's troubled marriage. Implications of the story, including again mismatch in desire or even impotence or sexual inadequacy, may be pursued in parallel to Catullus's relationship with his girlfriend as it is represented in the poems, but this would be speculative. Vulcan's only distinctive epithet in c. 36, "slow-footed" (*tardipedi*), seems mainly to allow for an allusive reference to poetic technique: as noted, perhaps to elegiac couplet, whose second line is thought to limp or go relatively slowly, or to scazon or choliambic, also called "limping iambic."⁶¹ The allusivity and technicality of the reference—Catullus scores a point based on his superior knowledge of, and facility in, meter—further the poem's claim that Catullus is the better judge of poetry and may therefore offer the wittier vow. To contemporaries and later readers in antiquity, Catullus was indeed "the learned poet," *poeta doctus*.⁶² His sort of sophisticated knowledge purports to be a long, self-conscious way from belief in the gods or, if such belief is everywhere unverifiable in the figured speech of ancient literature, at least from what we might regard as sincere or unironic expressions of private beliefs in public discourse.⁶³

From this perspective, Vulcan, like Venus and Cupid before him, is emptied of personality so as to serve better as an allusively witty metonym. As potentially vivid a figure as Vulcan (we were on the verge of imagining his smithic muscles, his calloused hands, the lines etched deeply around his eyes from squinting into the heart of the forge . . .) is reduced, indeed, to symbolizing "fire." For there is very little, if anything, for him to do here other than to accept whichever poems are judged by Catullus and/or his girlfriend to be the best of the worst. In other words, Vulcan cannot but accept the results of ordinary human conversation. Even more than Venus and Cupid, Vulcan is audience: he is totally silent, unless we grant that, at the end of the poem, some select

writings are indeed cast into the flames, which, only then and therefore, are heard to crackle.

All told, then, the gods are hardly significant in a poem like c. 36, a thoroughly human poem whose silences are, therefore, primarily and richly "sociocultural." As we have seen, Venus is colorful but more a symbol of what might be the girlfriend's behavior than a being in her own right, while Cupid is hardly more than an extension of that; and Vulcan stands in for fire, serving merely as an intermediary while the fire more vividly symbolizes human mastery over poems. These gods mainly indicate—merely pointing to—the social and interpersonal relationships that are c. 36's truer interest. They are merely signs, even tokens, to be exchanged along the lines of witty words, valued for their use value, indeed. With Venus, Cupid, and Vulcan understood in this way, we cannot say that there is a god in c. 36 that Catullus, the speaking subject, worships. Even Volusius has more life and substance to him, as well as—precisely—more utterance. C. 36 thus imagines social and interpersonal interaction as a kind of mastery. As long as human exchange continues, there are at least some meaningful sounds—the crinkling of paper and the meeting of hands, both "skins," and witty discussion of poems—to break what are naturally overpowering silences.

Catullus's poetics of silence, in particular what we might call his poetic mastery of sociocultural silence, would seem, then, to gain him and his readers some time before a final, natural silence takes over, before, if I may, "one endless silence is kept." In poems like cc. 22 and 36, Catullus thus advances the wittiest turn in conversation, the apt and learned word, as worthy of our attention and respect. On the one hand, this is clearly a positive. In poems like cc. 36 and 50, even cc. 10 and 35, Catullus shows that we may come a long way indeed from potentially debilitating confrontation with the (im)mortalizing power of "poetry" as it is, inevitably, writ larger and longer than any single human life, as it outlasts even the collective "mouths of men." There need not even be a bitter irony or resignation, much less the frail hand-wringing that may attend such pathetic tragedy. Instead there is the far more positive feeling of congenial competition in conversation, mastery of utterance and sociocultural silence together, among peers. As we have seen, this positive feeling includes a kind of sympathy for fellow poets and other exemplary language users.

On the other hand, the choice to value such a specialized linguistic

or poetic achievement brings one, as we will see in more detail in later chapters, into close contact with poetry's overpowering silence, ineluctably an analogue for the totalizing silence of death. From this perspective, Catullus's every well-turned utterance is a step toward his own, and others', final silence.⁶⁴ From this perspective, too, the claims of so many of the poems to be "occasional," even casual, are clearly fictional. The poet had to have worked long and hard to find the right words (or, after Eliot, "the least wrong" ones). As a result we may hear each seemingly offhand remark ironically concealing or quietly revealing the serious artistic commitments behind it. This is not surprising in a poet who explicitly values careful craftsmanship, in particular a mastery of form that effects a semblance of spontaneity. But it is significant in ways that go beyond aesthetics or, more precisely, that suggest a relationship between artistic ideal and the constraints of the natural, material world. For the time spent finding the right words is borrowed time, labor during what could be leisure, time that is ultimately lost.

Catullus may not be explicitly concerned about what Plato called the "ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry" (*Resp.* 606b5–6), nor has he recorded any explicit determination, in a Roman context, that a poetic achievement is the equal, if not the better, of more-traditional masculine accomplishments in politics and war. But by listening carefully we may hear even him occasionally caught short by the fact of poetic composition that remains. No matter how seemingly immediate, in its status as especially marked utterance a poem stands at some distance from action, such that the composing poet is at risk of only recalling action, not acting in his own right. That Catullus, the speaking subject of the poems, feels this is, I think, clear from the poems discussed so far: both in their topics and in the starker contrast between those topics, arguably worthless, and the verse itself, by and large taut if not vital. Some of the poems are superior to their own themes. What do we hear, holding up to our ear the silk purse made from the sow's ear?

By listening so carefully for silence, we may hear what the poet, so interested in silence himself, always hears, no matter his particular attention to vivid social interaction. Every ordinary conversation, including the momentary silence necessary as the occasion for witty speech, prefigures an endless pause. This might be true in particular of tedious conversation or with partners in whom one's interest flags. But the same thing must be true as well of witty partners including, in Catullus, one's self. Wit and charm are, then, scant and fleeting guards against the fact that none of us can break every silence, or break the ultimate silence, by

talking forever. Even at its most reclamatory, then, Catullus's poetry . . . or perhaps we should say: *especially* at its most reclamatory, that is, especially at its most social, interpersonal, and human, when it is most insistent about the materiality of poems, Catullus's poetry is also most aware of the limits imposed on speech and language art by our own form of "materiality," our mortality.⁶⁵

In the poems we have considered in this chapter, poetry is figured as something made by and exchanged among people: poems are figured as material objects. This reclamation of potentially too-abstract poetry as concrete objects to serve social purposes must, however, inevitably recall as well the (im)mortalizing force of poetry writ large, as the poems' attention to ostensibly telling detail turns quickly tawdry and, in the end, is emptied of meaning or "lasting value." For the poems are plausible indeed but unverifiable. By glorying immoderately in the ordinary, by beautifying at times what may be possible but is not clearly any good, the poems reveal just how much the particular is subsumed by the general. That this is not a reduction but an expansion, even a possible elevation of our condition, does little to offset the generally disquieting effect on the individual who has reached this conclusion. The poems direct the same refined attention to ordinary activities and qualities as they do to the sublime, debased, and ignoble. All things may thus appear in verse of the same aspirant polish, the same refined and slightly desperate will to art. And as all things appear in that diligently charming poetry, so poetry must contain and limit them, overpowering all things.

At risk of being overpowered by poetry, then, is the poet's own wit, his irony, his very will to artistic achievement. He is hard-pressed to maintain his willful and fragile suspension of disbelief in how, ultimately, witty irony gives way to tedious coincidence and other realities, all as undeniable in fact as they are unamenable to poetic fictionalization. Through his intense interest in modalities of speech and silence, the poet knows just as well as anyone can that there is no lasting capacity for something to be said while another is meant. For ultimately there is no said, no actually spoken or read aloud, no sociocultural silence, only a natural silence that is beyond the capacity of human utterance or other art to break. The danger of poetry spreading its wings—encompassing, as it does in Catullus's hands and others', more subject matters than before—is that more things are thereby shadowed.

We may thus say that a poet like Catullus, attuned as we have seen to the interactions of sociocultural and natural silences, of utterance and

silence, quietly discloses the fact that, eventually, there can be no utterance. Ultimately there can be only poetry always about to be uttered, always already imposing its necessary silence on human beings as they are potential speakers. From this perspective, Catullus's reclamation of poetry for human purposes must, with its fairly sociable light, cast into higher relief the dark and flattening tragedy to come. Even such good-natured exchanges, such jocular and non-zero-sum games that employ poems as tokens of exchange, may be ended by the absolute silence of death. In this way the absolute silence of death forms a natural contrast to the shifting sociocultural silences that characterize human interaction. It is to poems dealing with death, and to its figuration as natural, perhaps most absolute silence, that we now turn.

4

The Natural Silence of Death, Part 1

Cc. 65 and 68(a)

The silence of those infinite spaces terrifies me.

Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, 1670

In the poems considered in the preceding chapters, we have seen Catullus responding to silences that are primarily sociocultural. As they take place between or among members of a given society, such silences are open to manipulation and representation by a skillful practitioner of cultural tradition like our learned poet. Listening for such poeticized silences has helped us to understand especially how Catullus's occasional poems give so vivid an impression of being overheard. From the perspective advanced in this book, part of those poems' authenticity consists in their seeming to be in direct response to, and to come directly out of, the silence of other potential speakers. The figure of the poet as speaking subject thus gains in realism, or what we might call conversational verisimilitude, as he is arranged among potential interlocutors who are, at the poem's dramatic moment, "actually" silent for one reason or another. Of course, a given poem's arrangement of speakers need not correspond to any historical fact. Mostly we are not in a position to decide. For our purposes, however, it is enough that poems do represent plausible moments of utterance and its necessary, complementary silence. As such they may indeed be listened to for their silences.

I have been arguing, moreover, that this purpose of ours is not an imposition but matches an aspect of Catullus's poetics. As we have seen,

poem by poem he varies the relevant silences among plausibly factual and almost certainly fictional, explicit or implicit, congenial or charged. Not every poem acknowledges its speaker's dependence on a certain silence, and only a few seem to treat silence as a theme. But among those few are poems of metapoetic import and programmatic importance to Catullus's corpus. Nor must Catullus treat silence explicitly in order to signal its importance. Especially in chapter 3 we saw poems in which he figures himself as engaging in complex, ironic concealments and quiet disclosures of his own. In all these ways, I would say not only that certain poems respond to silence but that, more deliberately, Catullus has a poetics of silence. He makes something of silence, doing various things with various types of it. This is a remarkable component of his poetry: he has taken an inevitable fact of utterance, the fact that it depends on a certain silence, and made it an essential feature of his poetic fictions.

But even Catullus, a skillful practitioner indeed, can only do so much. If he is thus able to manipulate sociocultural silences in his poems, he reaches a limit—as poetry, language, utterance are themselves limited—in what is perhaps the most consequential kind of natural silence encountered in lived experience, the absolute silence of death. In this chapter and the next, we consider poems in which Catullus responds to that qualitatively different kind of silence: cc. 65, 68(a) and (b), 96, and 101. (For convenience I refer to these collectively as the “death poems.”) The silence that is of central interest in these poems has a sociocultural component, in that at least one person considered to be a potential interlocutor is of course unable to speak; insofar as that person's speech is desirable, whether to the poet or to somebody else, his silence elicits an emotional response that plays out in social networks and in cultural forms. But in comparison to the silences we have considered so far, the silence here is rather more natural. It is indeed a natural force over which a cultural practice like poetry, and so the poet as practitioner, has no control. Part of Catullus's interest here is precisely in how traditional forms of expression, even when performed innovatively, are insufficiently expressive in response to such natural silence.

In poems responding to the natural silence of death, we will therefore see Catullus at his least ironic. Perhaps it would be more precise to say “at his least *wittily* and *charmingly* ironic.” Insofar as he is, as a poet, of course still operating within poetic and other cultural traditions, he evokes a feeling of constraint, against which even his impressive capacity for innovation can seem to make little headway. The problem

of personal or innovative expression in public or traditional modes, a pervasive problem in late Roman Republican literature, lies heavily on him in the death poems. As the paragon of "learned poet," Catullus has language all around him, but precious little if any seems truly to convey meaning.¹ This is a different kind of irony, at the very least displeasing: the powerfully innovative poet is reduced to traditional modes of expression, and as a result even his poetry can offer little comfort.

Many of the poems considered in chapters 1 through 3 proudly display a sort of innovation in modes of speech relative to traditional, sociocultural silences: Catullus takes great delight in saying aloud what one *can* but *should not*. The death poems show him in a way less able to innovate because the material, the subject matter, is less tractable precisely in terms of a poetics of silence; the silence Catullus faces here is a natural silence unamenable to his preferred poetic representation and response. In other words, sociocultural silences seem to lend themselves to the poet's investigation or have provided a setting for the exercise of his active imagination; they conduce to meaningful fiction. By contrast the natural silence of death seems to shut down the poetic imagination by being too real: there can be no adequate description of it, nor of course is there any response from it. In that connection, a particular disappointment for Catullus is that the dead do not speak; formerly potential interlocutors are now permanently silenced. Against these natural "not-sayings," there is little or nothing that even the innovative poet *may* say, at least not meaningfully or to ordinary standards of satisfaction. As the natural silence of death cannot be responded to, and as the dead do not respond in what should be their own turn, Catullus's capacity for artful speech is thus constrained, even defeated, by an actual silence. His sociocultural "*may say*" is overmatched by a natural "*cannot be said*."

"If Lament Were Enough . . ."

Faced with the defeat of his poetry, what might the poet do?

I would like to fling my voice out like a cloth
 over the fragments of your death, and keep
 pulling at it until it is torn to pieces
 and all my words would have to walk around
 shivering, in the tatters of that voice;
 if lament were enough . . .

How sharp must be “the fragments of your death,” that they could tear to pieces a cloth flung over them! And how animated, even anthropomorphic, the words that are then left to “walk around shivering,” bereft of what was formerly their covering and protection. The images are paradoxical and powerful. “Death” is ordinarily not a body but an event or state of being, that is, nonbeing; as such it is a proxy experience, awareness of a discontinued being, the lived experience of another’s nonexistence, the resultant lament. Here, however, either (if the possessive, “of your death,” is subjective, death being the possessor) death is in itself frangible and may thus be imagined as composed of something like friable stone, ceramic, or glass; or (if the possessive is objective, death being possessed) death causes some other, equally nonbodily being to shatter or break: experience, perhaps, or emotion or memory. In either case, something that is also not fully a body but a surface, a cloth, is dismembered or made discontinuous. It is as if the salient characteristic of the “voice” is not articulation—literally, “jointing” or “movement at joints,” as the term figures in ancient thought about language—but its smoothness, its warm covering of words and gathering of them into a happy and unhuddled whole.²

The poet “would like to fling [such a] voice,” “if [only] lament were enough.” But lament is not enough, so he cannot. Similarly, the “words,” also ordinarily bodiless, are imagined as embodied enough to walk around and be diminished by the cold, dressed only in strips and therefore stripped themselves, not dismembered like the voice but disclosed as it is torn; the words are discovered, uncovered, in a way undressed. Along with the voice, these words would be cast out and, if we may draw on the experience of other exiles, given to know their new nakedness, their changed relationship to their own bodies, their new relationship to death. As the voice becomes a cloth, words become bodies and are made uncomfortably aware of their memberment, their embodiment as it tends to pieces.³

The images resound with myth. We may be reminded of Eve’s and Adam’s “knowing that they were naked” in Genesis 3:8 and wondering, as Milton has it, “where to find their place of rest” (*Paradise Lost* 12.646–47).⁴ But the images’ power comes precisely from their repeated insistence on the same paradox. Words may seem to link what is bodied over time, that which may become disembodied in fact, with what is bodiless in its unchanging essence. That such a link is possible only in analogy (the voice is “like a cloth”) or as unfulfilled potential (“I *would* like . . . if lament *were* enough”) deepens the pathos, figuring lived ex-

perience as it is disappointing or disquieting.⁵ It is virtually a cry from the depths, while any actual ascent is rather more difficult.⁶

It also reminds us that all this paradox is founded in a person, the poet whose presence from the beginning—the lines begin with “I”—is, in the irony characteristic of tragedy, already and always too late in recognizing the nature of things. As he seems to admit his *anagnorisis*, to say that at last he understands, we understand that what he feels is the most disquieting regret: not at any decision that was under his control, but at not recognizing and acknowledging earlier that, in the final analysis, nothing is. (This is true both psychologically and ontologically: “nothing is [under our control]” and “nothing is [period: nothing exists any longer]”). As he speaks for us, we may say that while we have yet to die, death not only awaits, it anticipates: death comes first as well as last. Our response to that precedence, and our expression of our own belatedness, may be either lament or, since lament is insufficient, silence. The voice is torn to unprotective pieces, and words chatter meaninglessly.

As a Result of Death’s Silence, Unmeaningful Utterance

Some of this volume’s readers may know that the poem under discussion is not Catullus’s but Rilke’s (“Requiem for a Friend”); at first glance, the conclusions we might draw are therefore not ancient but “modern.”⁷ But in its striking evocation of notions and feelings we have seen already implicit in Catullus, and in metaphorical language that would not be out of place in the latter’s polished verse, Rilke’s poem helps to make clear a way in which ancient and modern poetry, like ancient and modern experience, overlap in their incapacity completely to articulate death. The quotation from Rilke suggests how the poetic response to that fact may focus on its effects on language, including a disorientation in poetry. As we have begun to see, a profound effect indeed is to make language seem less continuously articulated or meaningful. In Rilke’s image, language is thus “fragmented.” In different metaphorical domains, and pushed further, the same effect could be captured in more violent images of disjuncture, dismemberment, butchery. As we will see, death may also be figured fairly concretely as total absence, a sort of emptiness into which all language, even capacity for language, vanishes without response: an absolute silence indeed.⁸

In more abstract terms, in contrast to the bodily sort of mortality

thus imputed to human language, death's capacity for expression is continuous in a paradoxical, even uncanny way. Overpowering human language, death's own characteristic "utterance" is strictly silence. In death, those two opposites meet in a shared, dissatisfying sublimity: each is beyond human capacity to comprehend and is therefore strictly meaningless. Faced with this sublime sort of silence-as-utterance, neither poetry's ancient claim to offer immortality in culture nor Catullus's more particular capacity for playing with the cultural standards of a high society seems to have any meaningful effect. Ultimately it is not the living, not even the poet as exemplary speaking subject, who may succeed at speech, but death that speaks most demandingly, or seems to by imposing an absolute silence that is wholly natural and so intractable in sociocultural modes. Considered thus as a speaker, death imposes perfect silence on every potentially speaking subject but itself. But of course this is to no witty end, for death as speaker does not invent but only endlessly repeats; we could say that death is not a poet, only a rhapsode.

With Rilke's vivid image in mind, we may recall our discussion in chapter 3 of the fragility of poems as material objects susceptible to human action including interpersonal or social exchange. The suggestion must be that ultimately all such tokens are fragmented, "pulled at until torn to pieces," until all human voices and other traces no longer sound or otherwise signify. From this perspective, even the flashiest of human meaning makings, the most affective "significations" and aesthetically striking "poetries," are no less given to fade. In this connection, we may note that, although ancient "paper" could be made from flattened plants or, less often, dried vegetable pulp, quite often paper was actual flesh, animal skins preserved and smoothed. Paper, and on it poetry, was therefore very much "like a cloth," a covering for a living being, and so could easily tear and tatter as well as, in many places, burn.⁹

To see a profound connection between the materiality of poems and the mortality of poets and their interlocutors, then, we do not need any Greco-Roman story of paper made from human skin (I am unaware of one), or even, for example, any more-than-passing interest in tattoos.¹⁰ From the perspective being developed herein, poems must already be "human" very precisely, that is, "earthly," in that *homo*, "human being," relates to *humus*, "earth" or "soil," vital but therefore passing, friable.¹¹ Poems are passing, as it were in their poets' image. As transcriptions of utterance or directions for performance, they suggest the transitory nature of utterance by themselves physically fading, drying, crumbling.¹² From this perspective, even the most ostensibly immortal representa-

tion of an utterance is only a trace that must pass along with its physical substrate, however the latter is hoped to endure. The voice gives out, as when, it is reported, Maecenas would take over for Virgil at the reading of the *Georgics* to Augustus in 29 BCE. Flesh sags, wrinkles, dries, and drifts away. Stone and marble crumble. Bronze oxidizes or, given its scarcity and cost, is repurposed, any original transcription lost.¹³

We may therefore say that Catullus's unusual attention to materiality, to sense-perceptible beings, does not result in effects that are purely poetic or personal, whether purely literary or concerning the tribulations of a completely fictionalized persona. Attentive both to the materiality of his poems and to conventional expressions of poetry's (im)materiality and (im)mortality, Catullus, it would seem, could not help but see poetry as implicated in mortality and death. In other words, and as actual words written down to endure—"if but by labour won and to endure"—poems are already implicitly deathly things. The sociocultural silence they require cannot but symbolize—and, eventually, indicate—the absolute, natural silence of death.

Language as Proverbially Untrustworthy

As an example that will help us transition to the fullest expression of this situation, in the death poems, we may briefly consider c. 70. When Catullus writes there that "what a woman says to her desirous lover / ought to be written in the wind and rushing water" (vv. 3–4: *sed mulier cupido quod dicit amanti / in vento et rapida scribere oportet aqua*), the effect is not only beautiful or important because of Catullus in particular but also meaningful because of the truly disquieting general situation in which language, of obvious importance to the poet, cannot be trusted.

The lines are beautiful indeed. After two thousand years, they remain a vivid image of contradictory feelings, in which the appetitive and more practically thoughtful, not to say rational, parts of the lover's thinking could, like battling winds, come to no timely agreement; the ship of the soul is thus tossed uselessly about or becalmed. As a result, there is a feeling here of self-recrimination: Catullus knows better and thus feels that he ought to have known better earlier if not all along.¹⁴ And yet he wishes that Lesbia were true to her words, not only in their flirtatious fiction but also in serious fact preferring him over all other suitors, including Jupiter (vv. 1–2: *nulli se dicit mulier mea nubere malle / quam mihi, non si se Iuppiter ipse petat*). Further, the emphasis on

marriage—explicit in *nubere*, implicit in Jupiter’s “suit,” *petitio*, and in the repetition of “woman,” *mulier*, perhaps to be translated “wife” as opposed to “girlfriend” or “prostitute,” which is *puella*—may imply a disappointing discovery that a deeply desired situation, an affair with a married woman, cannot last. In particular this involves Lesbia: it seems that the very free behavior that Catullus found attractive in the first place has now caused him pain.¹⁵

The natural silence of death is perhaps the most powerful, single example of how, in Catullus’s poetics of silence, certain “natures” or “natural facts” are beyond his capacity to control or to poeticize as he might like. From this perspective his somewhat desperate emphasis on marriage in c. 70 may be read as a particular example of a more general situation. The impossibility of marriage or, with it, emotional communion is derived from a much more pervasive and consequential problem than a difference between Catullus’s and Lesbia’s stations, desires, or even basic personalities. Most generally, the problem is the poet’s discovery that words cannot be trusted.¹⁶ Although the untrustworthiness of women and words was proverbial, I would say that this would not have lessened the effects of Catullus’s experience of the untrustworthiness of language at firsthand. What we might call the flimsiness of language is not limited to any particular interpersonal relationship or social or sociocultural situation, but applies in various ways to them all. To borrow again from Rilke, it may be more accurate to say that the untrustworthiness of words is the sharp fact on which the cloth of social situations is torn. If such tearing is not inevitable, then from the poet’s perspective it is ineluctable. Catullus’s awareness of that fact has consequences that go far beyond his belated recognition, here, of who—or, perhaps, what—Lesbia is, into ideas and feelings about death. In terms of Fitzgerald’s articulation of Catullus’s positionality, we could say that the problem is that there exists something that is not positional.¹⁷ There is a discovery that, in the final analysis, does not depend on relations within a society and culture but rather contextualizes them absolutely. In this way, Catullus’s sense of the absolute silence of death reveals to him the dreadful contingency of human meaning making.

An “Always Gloomy Poetry” (65.12–14)

The death that seems to have affected Catullus most strongly, or at least resulted in his most affective poetry, is his brother’s. The death of Catul-

lus's brother appears explicitly in only a small number of poems: cc. 65, 68(a) and (b), and 101; arguably it is implicit, in sentiment and phrasings, in c. 96 as well. As an event or theme for poetic depiction, it is therefore surpassed numerically by many others, including the affair with Lesbia, the theme of marriage, "literary" conversations, and insult and invective.¹⁸ Despite this distribution, the death may be said to play a role in Catullus's poetics more generally. Although, as we have seen, there is reason to doubt whether any of the poems is truly occasional, the death poems are unambiguous, if necessarily ambivalent, about the poet's relationship to passing time.¹⁹ The poems' own continuously present speech emphasizes the contrast between the living, who may speak, and the dead, who of course are no longer able to speak or otherwise respond. By seeming to participate in that harrowing contrast, other poems, even poetry as a practice, start to dissatisfy or even disturb. As Skinner puts it, poetry thus reveals "the failure of art to bridge the chasm between life and death"; for Catullus this means disclosing "the illusory nature of Callimachean poetic immortality" in particular.²⁰ When, evidently, not immortality but death has come, then the vaunts of such cultural traditions as the language arts pale in contrast to unmeaningful, ineffable natural silence.

We may think of this as a version of a central problem of poetry, the problem of expression: of finding, as Eliot puts it, the "least wrong words." The problem is one of modality: How to speak? As we have seen already in chapter 3, Catullus's poetics of silence register a deep interest in this problem on both theoretical and practical levels. Its modulation in the context of the silence of death may be suggested, first, by Catullus's own words in the form of a striking simile in c. 65. (A full translation of the poem is provided in chapter 5.) On its surface c. 65 serves to introduce c. 66, framing that poem as the response to a request by its intended recipient, Hortalus. C. 65 takes the moment of dedication as an opportunity to describe the difficulty of composing poetry in the trying circumstance of a loved one's death. The description consists of a series of similes, of which we consider the first here.

Catullus writes: "I'll sing songs always gloomy with your death, like those beneath the dense shadows [or: shades, ghosts] of branches sung by the Daulian [sc. nightingale, i.e., Procne], bewailing the death of her lost Itylus" (vv. 12–14: *semper maesta tua carmina morte canam, / qualia sub densis ramorum concinit umbris / Daulias, absumpti fata gemens Ityli*).²¹ This simile seems to have a programmatic force, whether or not one accepts Skinner's argument that cc. 65–116 is a *libellus* in its own right.

The future tense "I'll sing," *canam*, implies that the singing of gloomy songs will continue beyond the "original" or "actual" speech act of this poem. Moreover, although it is uncertain whether the plural *carmina* is meant to imply multiple poems or a single poem, as it can, the other death poems make clear that, even if not planned at the time of c. 65, more than one poem eventuated in response. We may therefore treat *carmina* as referring to more than one poem, and as combining with *canam* to declare that Catullus's poetic activity will "always" be gloomy because of the death. This means not necessarily that every poem will be about the death but only that each will have some of that original "gloom." As we have started to see, by evoking the poet's emotion in response to his brother's death, each such poem will necessarily at least touch on the more general problem of expression in response to death's natural silence.

At the same time, Catullus likens himself to a person who has undergone an irreversible transformation out of human and into nonhuman being. He compares himself to Procne, whose transformation into the nightingale is the conclusion to the story in which her sister, Philomela, has been raped by Tereus and, lest she tell the tale, betongued. Philomela succeeds at indicating to Procne what happened by depicting it on a woven tapestry.²² One question raised by this story is whether a given medium is appropriate for expressing what has happened. One answer is that the world may signify, via "signing" or—to translate extensively—via "translating experience into language," more than we are typically made to suspect or to listen for. Prior to and outside the death poems, as we have seen, this is a positive opportunity for the outrageous poet. But in light of a truly atypical event, Martial's dictum that "whoever tells such stories keeps more quiet" (12.35: *quisquis narrat talia plura tacet*) takes on a different tone. After an atypical event, one whose representation in ordinary discourse must dissatisfy, language users generally and poets in particular struggle with the feeling that the stuff of our personal, seemingly idiosyncratic experience resists expression in traditional, public terms.²³ As expression becomes more difficult, the negative spaces that surround utterance, the silences, carry greater weight and higher charge.

Faced with that problem of expression, and thus surrounded by increasingly freighted silences, Catullus represents himself as having been transformed. The comparison to Procne evokes a feeling of violence done to language: the accident of Catullus's brother's death has not merely changed his language but damaged it. As a poet, Catul-

lus must thus feel transformed indeed; like Procne, he has been made into something fundamentally other, even nonhuman. Any strength or beauty to his new, “gloomy” mode of singing thus comes at a profound cost, including a change in his own appreciation of poetry. As death exposes the limits of traditional modes of expression, the poet as skillful practitioner of a cultural tradition finds himself unable to maintain his wonted, virtuosic irony. Like the nightingale, he seems to be left with a mode of expression that is so straightforwardly singular as to be nonhuman, and so natural as to defy his attempts at modulation and control: like Procne, in response to the natural silence of death the poet finds himself with only one kind of thing to say. In this way the speaking subject, the fictional source of speech, is drained of all “occasional” detail aside from the one that was not deliberate and cannot be changed: whatever stories he might choose to tell, saying them outrageously aloud or disclosing them quietly, Catullus now also invariably signifies his brother’s death. Here we may note that the Latin *canam*, “I’ll sing,” is less an expression of the speaker’s will than a statement about the future. In this specialized, even harrowed existence as a signifier, Catullus might have compared himself not only to Procne but also to Echo: torn away from the full, human range of meanings, he approaches an absolute simplicity of utterance—his poetry “always gloomy” as the death was gloomy—that is perilously close to a wholly unmeaningful silence.²⁴

Unironic Facts and the Fiction of Ironic Poetry: The Case of Troy

The comparison to Procne could be taken as enriching Catullus’s representation of his response to his brother’s death. Certainly the image is artistic. But the simile also suggests a feeling of diminished agency. Like the woman, first silenced as a human being and then transformed into a nonhuman being whose signification is expressive but inarticulate, Catullus claims that he is unable to manage the sort of refined language that, for him and his circle, has characterized the best social interactions. Like the nightingale, Catullus claims to sing now only naturally, in a way that reveals his being has been changed against his will. Following his brother’s death, Catullus experiences his own agency not as a product of his will but as it is, evidently, dependent for its existence on traditional, impersonal discourses.

We return to the question of agency in c. 65 more fully in chapter 5.

Here I focus on how this situation is emphasized by the fact that the death of Catullus's brother took place at Troy. Connoting not only public or collective demands on individual behavior but also a literary tradition that Catullus had previously chosen not to follow, Troy seems to threaten the poet's agency further by subordinating his own poetic choices, his fictions, to others' choices as those that have the superior status of fact.²⁵ An ambiguity in my English—"at Troy" meaning both "at the city of Troy" and "during the Trojan war"—is my attempt to reflect what I take to be an ambiguity present already in Catullus.²⁶ We cannot confirm that Catullus's brother died at what was taken in antiquity to be the site of the city of Troy. And of course there is no question of the brother having taken part in the famous war set there traditionally a thousand years or more before his own birth. But the coincidence of setting is enough for Catullus to feel compelled to understand the recent death and the ancient war as somehow connected. This means a connection between, on the one hand, the death as the end point of Catullus's "household" (as we will consider in some detail later) and, on the other hand, the war as a starting point for poetry in the form of the Homeric epics. Insofar as these connections are accidental and yet cannot be changed, they are intolerable. For Catullus the carefully composing poet, these facts set a limit to his artistic freedom, what we have seen is his love of witty fictionalization.

An accidental fact like Troy, then, seems to cause Catullus to wonder what it means that poetry, like utterance more generally, is a fiction in the sense of being ranged against such inevitable and unchangeable facts as death. In that context, must all such fiction dissatisfy, or perhaps even start to sound like falsehood? Suddenly, for Catullus this question is not idle or "merely artistic." Already after Homer, a story is worthy of being told insofar as it centers around an unbridgeable distance indeed, the impossibility of true homecoming due to war, death, and concomitant change. On this scale, a human being is worthy of being recalled, or treated as the hero of the epic, insofar as his actions relate to that distance. In other words, the glory conveyed by epic comes at a human cost: quite simply, there is glory insofar as there has been death or similar irrevocable loss. Of course, this was obvious already in the epics.²⁷

But this is precisely the "chasm," as we have seen Skinner put it, that Catullus considers unbridgeable. As he was compelled by circumstance to ring the changes between the story told by Homer and that of his own brother's death, the purported capacity of poetry to immortalize its subjects could not but no longer ring true. With this in mind, we discover

in the death poems a spare and eloquent sign system. Catullus seeks, as ever but now with a changed intensity, to refresh what he sees as tired, even empty old metaphors and manners of speech. He seeks to break a silence that is disappointingly characteristic of traditional discourse by, as ever, innovating as a language user. Only now the result is more than witty or clever, as he struggles with the feeling that no expression will feel meaningful, only merely emotional. I would say, then, that Catullus, with his keen sensitivity to metapoetic questions, feels that the verbal resources of poetry have been too highly vaunted. Indeed, the fact that the same poetic or linguistic resources may—must—be deployed for parodically glorifying a Flavius, his *latera ecfututa*, and his “cherished” *febriculosum scortum* as for seriously commemorating Catullus’s truly beloved and truly dead brother seems to have struck the poet as a sort of metaphysical wrong. How can poetic language be at the same time so capacious and yet so ineffectual?

Before pursuing these and other feelings about silence in the death poems, we may say one more thing about Catullus’s programmatic claim in c. 65: “I’ll sing songs always gloomy with your death” (v. 12: *semper maesta tua carmina morte canam*). The poet figures himself as unable to rise to the kinds of occasions that seem to have inspired so much of his occasional poetry, mainly erotic or invective, in either case interpersonal. We may emphasize, however, that Catullus has not been stopped in these lines, and was not stopped in others, by his brother’s death from writing poetry entirely. This would seem to go without saying. For otherwise there would not be, at least, cc. 65 (and perhaps c. 66, although its composition need not have followed the death), 68(a) and (b), and 101, all of which refer to the death unambiguously, as well as others, like c. 96, which may be thought to touch on it.

What I wish to emphasize here is that Catullus says this himself: he “will not stop singing.” He predicts utterance, what we could call a continual antisilence. The songs will always be “stricken,” *maesta*, “gloomy” or “depressed,” but by the same token they will always be.²⁸ Does this mean that Catullus indeed continued to compose but that each composition, each poem, was colored by his feeling about his brother’s death? Because of our almost total uncertainty about the timing of the poems relative to one another, and because of our certainty, again almost total, that no poem need represent Catullus “accurately,” we cannot trace a “development” in the historical poet’s person or even really in the persona.²⁹ We are therefore left with the expression itself, with Catullus’s assertions—so certain—that the poems will always be and that he

will always be a poet. He knows that “he” will no longer be the same, nor defined by the same seemingly open choices as previously, but he does not give himself up completely to silence. Even in the face of his brother’s death, Catullus’s poetics of silence remains complex.

Death and Post-Erotic Poetry: C. 68(a)

It is from this perspective, of the poet grappling with the limits imposed on poetry and utterance by absolute, natural silence, that Catullus writes 68(a).³⁰ Catullus responds negatively to a friend’s request for new poems.³¹ The friend, Mallius, has evidently complained that he is unable to find either solace in sleep or pleasure from familiar poems due to his preoccupation with, it is implied, ongoing bad luck in love: “him neither does sacred Venus allow to rest / in soft sleep, abandoned in his celibate bed, / nor do the Muses please with sweet poetry of old / authors, since his mind is wakeningly anxious” (vv. 5–8: *quem neque sancta Venus molli requiescere somno / desertum in lecto caelibe perpetitur / nec ueterum dulci scriptorum carmine Musae / oblectant, cum mens anxia peruigilat*).

As Catullus reports it, Mallius’s complaint and situation are centered around two linked transitions in which what used to be “beloved” has lost its luster and has therefore become uninteresting. In the first transition, Mallius himself is “abandoned” (*desertum*), evidently by a lover, such that the bed that formerly was the site of such pleasure is now displeasingly empty.³² In the second transition, Mallius’s attempt to console himself by reading familiar erotic poems fails due, as we may divine, to the poems’ very overfamiliarity. Perhaps the poems had been read aloud by the erstwhile lovers, whether for general inspiration or more particular, even technical, sexual suggestion?³³ Whether or not the poems were thus guilty by association, Mallius has been affected as a reader by the departure of his lover. Judged unworthy or, if that is too strong, uninteresting, Mallius in turn cannot read with the same fresh judgments as earlier. Two kinds of sheets—bed linens, the “sheets” (*carta*) on which poems were shared—have grown stale. We can almost hear Mallius’s weary sighs and solitary groans, his ennui. Catullus, too, can hear them; he seems indeed to have overheard them in Mallius’s “letter.” From his own perspective, faced with cause for a much more serious complaint, Catullus cannot but judge Mallius’s melancholy as out of proportion and his imagery as melodramatic. Although Catul-

lius's situation is of course not Mallius's responsibility, the latter has the misfortune of having his letter reach a reader whose own situation has severely limited his capacity for sympathy.

Mallius's letter is "written in tears," and its writer is figured as "a shipwrecked castaway to be pulled out of the sea's foaming waves and brought back from the threshold of death" (respectively v. 2: *conscriptum hoc lacrimis mittis epistolium*; and vv. 3–4: *naufragum ut eiectum spumantibus aequoris undis / subleuem et a mortis limine restituum*). Tears and saltwatery breakers run together, staining letter and writer both, and to that writer the sea becomes the very boundary marker between life and death. C. 68(a) does not say as much here, but we may imagine a traditional parallel between death and sharp taste, the latter epitomized by salt as it infuses seawater and tears. On this reading, between the lines there would be a subtle, sense-perceptual figuration of how the alleged materiality of Mallius's letter represents the lived reality of his experience and thus its difference from Catullus's experience and response. In telling contrast to the alleged situation of its writer, the letter has escaped somehow from the "shipwreck." Although it is not "unharm(ed)," being stained with tears, from Catullus's more serious perspective, its "survival" may call into question the effect of that image, its claim about Mallius's experience, and Mallius's claim on the image. We may thus overhear Catullus weighing Mallius's claim of a near-death experience against the fact that he continues to exist in, as it were, a fair copy. While an actual letter might be blemished, its historical author is clean.

BITTERNESS AND DIRECT ADDRESS

When, then, at the beginning of c. 68(a) Catullus describes Mallius's misfortune as "sharply bitter," *acerbo*, we may hear outright sarcasm. "That you write to me when you are oppressed by sharply bitter misfortune and chance" (*quod mihi fortuna casuque oppressus acerbo*), the poem's opening line, is itself bitter, if perhaps without venom. Catullus has bitterness indeed about his own experience and therefore some venom for "fate" or "fortune," *fortuna*, but for Mallius he manages a bland good manners. He completes the thought begun by that opening line by saying, "[The fact of your writing] is pleasing to me, since you say that I am your friend" (v. 9: *id gratum est mihi, me quoniam tibi dicis amicum*). As if to emphasize their friendship, he calls him Manny, *Mani*, a metrically convenient but, I think, not therefore less sincerely affectionate diminutive of *Manilius* (vv. 9 and 28).

We may nevertheless sense that Catullus's good manners are all that

keep him from lashing out. In other words, an ingrained sense of irony including tact in speech may keep him from writing too matter-of-factly. Any bitterness to Mallius's "oppression" is sweet in comparison to Catullus's own. Mallius may have lost a lover, but Catullus has lost his only brother: "Oh, my brother, stolen from me" (v. 20: *o misero frater adempte mihi*). The brother's unique status is emphasized by repetition of the adverb *una*, idiomatically "together" or "along with," literally "as one." Furthering the contrast, Catullus's apostrophe to his anonymous brother overpowers his use of Mallius's name: although the poem is addressed to Mallius, indirectly but much more significantly Catullus speaks with his brother in mind. This marks c. 68(a) as clearly among the death poems, in parallel to c. 65, where, as we will see, an apostrophe to the brother likewise commands more attention than direct address to the poem's ostensible addressee, Hortalus.

In this context, c. 68(a)'s opening line serves as a first signal that vv. 1–10 constitute a setup before the reveal of true topic and attention in vv. 11–14. In those four lines, Catullus shows how it is really done: he shows "the waves of fortune in which [he is] submerged" (v. 13: *quis merse fortunae fluctibus ipse*).³⁴ It is significant that Catullus appropriates Mallius's image of a shipwrecked traveler for himself, in a way that expressly contrasts his experience with his friend's and finds the latter's wanting, his imagery overstated. Both images could be moving, but they seem to be regarded as, again, excessively melodramatic. As we have seen, both are grounded in a commonplace loverly complaint. While this would be, as we have also seen, up Catullus's alley, at this poem's occasion he is in the grip of something more serious. We will see in chapter 5 how Mallius's images are therefore trumped by the very similar images in c. 101—an offering stained with tears that, in turn, emphasize the futility of attempted conversation, a very different kind of end to a sea voyage.

In the meantime, we note that Catullus says that his joys were nourished in life by his brother's "love," *amor* (vv. 23–24: *gaudia nostra, / quae tuus in uita dulcis alebat amor*). Clearly they are undernourished or even starved now, after the brother's death. Paradoxically, whereas his brother died after a sea voyage, it is Catullus who feels cast away. Worse than the suggestion that Mallius has grown tired of the same old poems and overfamiliar bed, Catullus has lost all taste for the ironic or artificial bittersweetness—the saccharine?—of erotic or poetic game playing: "the goddess who mixes sweet bitterness in with anxieties" is "not unknown to [him]," but Catullus's zeal for "that study has been stolen

away by [his] brother's death" (vv. 17–20: *non est dea nescia nostri, / quae dulcem curis miscet amaritatem. / sed totum hoc studium luctu fraterna mihi mors / abstulit*). Tellingly, it is immediately after this explicit notice of the cause for Catullus's particular poetic incapacity that the poem turns to what I take to be its truest exclamation (v. 20, quoted earlier). Not Mallius but the brother is the poem's most important addressee. This is ironic but not witty, charming, or—much less—funny: if the brother is the most important addressee, he is of course also the least likely to respond.

INDIRECTLY ADDRESSING DEPENDENCE ON THE DEAD

There is a way, then, in which c. 68(a) may be read as seeking but ultimately failing to circumvent the problem as we will see it expressed more generally in c. 101, namely, that there can be no conversation, certainly no personally or emotionally satisfying conversation, with the dead. The problem is that, in asking aloud, "Why?" we "address the mute ashes in vain" (101.4: *et mutam nequiquam alloquerer cinerem*). One possible solution to this problem is not to address the dead directly but to discuss them with the living, as it were addressing them indirectly by calling them to mind. It is a masterstroke of c. 68(a), however, and a sign of Catullus's real bereavement, that we are not given to know whether such an attempt may succeed. Catullus cannot even limit himself to the attempt: although Mallius is expressly the addressee, it is, again, Catullus's exclamation to his brother that stands out.

Indeed, the apostrophe leads to additional lines, in which the poem's second person, Catullus's truest second person, is emphatically indicated still to be the brother: "you have broken my goods by dying, brother; / as one with you has our home been entombed; / all of our joys, as one with you, have perished, / which your sweet love nourished in life" (vv. 21–24: *tu mea tu moriens fregisti commoda, frater, / tecum una tota est nostra sepulta domus, / omnia tecum una perierunt gaudia nostra, / quae tuus in uita dulcis alebat amor*). This extended address serves to emphasize the one-sidedness of all such "conversation," the absence of any actual "turn taking." The superabundance of second-person forms, including pronouns (*tu, tu*: "you"; *tecum, tecum*: "with you") and possessives (*tuus*: "your"), is a particular embarrassment of riches, a linguistic richness that contrasts with real poverty in life. Those second-person singular forms are juxtaposed with first-person singular and plurals (*mea*: "my"; *nostra, nostra*: "our") to single out the difference: Catullus and his brother are different people, however close their

emotional association, while of course the second person is, in an important way, no longer a person.³⁵ A repeated phrase, “as one with you” (*tecum una*), deepens the pathos by emphasizing their former strong interdependence.

As the one died, then, so the other is damaged or “broken.” The speaker’s “home” or household (*domus*) depended for its life and strength on the second person, identified with “all joys” (*omnia gaudia*).³⁶ The brother’s importance is emphasized further by the fact that his are the only actions taken in these lines (*fregisti*: “broke”; *alebat*: “nourished”), as opposed to actions undergone or states of being changed (*sepulta est*: “is buried”; *perierunt*: “perished”). Further, the change in tense between his actions subtly emphasizes the fact and lingering feelings of his death: he “used to nourish” (*alebat*) his and Catullus’s joys—I take these first-person plural possessives as truly plural, contrasting with Catullus’s new singularity—with sweet love. But now “by dying” (*moriens*), he “has broken” (*fregisti*) Catullus’s goods: the present-tense participle (*moriens*) suggests a death that is somehow ongoing, while its lasting consequences are emphasized by the perfect-tense main verb (*fregisti*). Even as the moment of death itself has passed, its effects linger on into the present moment of speech. C. 68(a) is therefore quite specifically the sort of poem predicted in c. 65, “a poem gloomy with [sc., the brother’s] death” (65. 12: *maesta tua carmina morte*).

DISPLACEMENT AND DISORIENTATION

That Catullus has been deeply affected by this loss to household is emphasized further by his inaction or incapacity, what I have referred to as his diminished agency. In the following lines, Catullus attempts to collect himself and put a braver face on the situation. But he is undone, in his own terms virtually unmanned. In particular he is incapable of erotic poetry: that wonted “zealous activity his brother’s death has snatched away in grief” (vv. 19–20: *sed totum hoc studium luctu fraterna mihi mors / abstulit*). This is a strange kind of silence for Catullus, out of which he is unable to speak outrageously. At most he may attempt to redefine his situation in Mallius’s—and perhaps his own—eyes. This he does in a second reference to his “zealous activity” (v. 26: *studia*), suggesting that he has taken a sort of action indeed. If in the preceding lines his brother’s death “stole away” (*abstulit*) that activity, now Catullus claims that he himself (he is emphasized: *ego*) has, “out of his brother’s passing,” “put that activity out of mind, put it to flight, along with all lovely delights of the mind” (vv. 25–26: *cuius ego interitu tota*

de mente fugaui / haec studia atque omnes delicias animi). Thus would *not* writing erotic poetry be an action, an active decision, on Catullus's part.

This cannot, however, be completely affirmative of the poet's agency. In the epic context implied by Troy, feelings of motion or change in location would seem to connote the very "unbridgeable gap" that is central to Homer: distant death in war and the difficulties of homecoming. At this point in c. 68(a) motion is redoubled: the brother has "gone" (*interitu* comes from *inter-ire*, whose root means "to go"), and Catullus has "put to flight" (*fugaui*). Although these real and metaphorical motions must overshadow any fictional motion sickness afflicting the pseudo-shipwrecked Mallius, still they cannot save Catullus from his own "waves of fortune" (v. 13: *fortunae fluctibus*). In this poem, even allegedly deliberate acts of motion therefore connote displacement.

This feeling of displacement is picked up again toward the poem's conclusion, where Catullus claims to be writing from somewhere other than, and unlike, Rome. As a result he does not have his usual library: "For the fact that I haven't got much of my library with me / is due to my living at Rome: there's my home, / there's my seat, there my time passes fruitfully; / here only one of many capsules has followed me" (vv. 33–36: *nam, quod scriptorum non magna est copia apud me, / hoc fit, quod Romae uiuimus: illa domus, / illa mihi sedes, illic mea carpitur aetas; / huc una ex multis capsula me sequitur*). That un-Roman, un-homelike place is, ironically, "this place," closest to the first-person speaker; for "here" (*huc*) to be away from "home there" (*illa domus*) precisely delineates a profoundly affective displacement. Catullus's current location is identified as Verona (v. 27), a provincial seat implicitly contrasted with the capital that is Rome. Whereas the latter is well stocked with poetry, the former is a place to which "only one of many little boxes" (v. 36: *una ex multis capsula*), that is, "hardly any poetry at all," has followed the poet.³⁷ This contrast between locations has been read as dramatizing the perceived tension, in this and other poems, between Catullus's Transpadane origins, relatively rustic (marked by *rusticitas*), and his adopted Rome, home by definition to the urbane (*urbanitas*).³⁸

Any simple identification of the poet's location is, however, complicated by the general situation and by the particular terms employed. Generally, I think it is possible to understand the location as affected by, if not part of, his sea voyage/funeral procession to or from the Troad.³⁹ Whether he has traveled from Rome to Verona on the way to "Troy" or has returned from seeing his brother's grave site to "hol[e] himself up in provincial Verona to mourn him," his experience of space and so his

sense of place is clearly represented as having been affected by, even recentered around, his brother's death.⁴⁰ In the context of that death, Catullus's statement of residence—"I live at Rome: there is my home" (v. 34: *Romae uiuimus, illa domus*)—has literal and figurative ironies.⁴¹ Literally, there is a contrast between "we [who] live" (*uiuimus*) and an important part, even the most important part, of "we," the brother, who of course lives no longer. As a result the first-person plural verb, possibly "inclusive," that is, including Catullus and addressee(s), is in fact exclusive: literally, now only Catullus and Mallius may comprise the "we" of "we [who] live," while the brother counts no longer.⁴² Figuratively, then, there is the "home" (*domus*), which at this moment recalls its earlier appearance in the poem, where the "home has been buried" (v. 22: *tecum una tota est nostra sepulta domus*). In the Latin this is emphatically "our home": Catullus continues in emphatic isolation. This is felt to be a true abandonment. I would not hesitate to consider it worse, from the poet's perspective, than the numerically better-attested "abandonment" by Lesbia.

From this perspective, c. 68(a)'s description of Rome as Catullus's continued "seat, [where his] time passes fruitfully" (v. 35: *illa mihi sedes, illic mihi carpitur aetas*) is elegiac in tone. A true "time" of sweet and abundant youth was shared; to resume it, perhaps even to recall it, now alone must feel somehow improper. It would perhaps be too specific to say that Catullus feels a survivor's guilt, but we may yet detect a feeling of his own incapacity, even illegitimacy.⁴³ Catullus, whose poetry has evidently moved himself and others, has been differently moved—displaced and disoriented—by his personal, emotional experience of the kind of thing that art claims as its inspiration. At this particular moment of possible inspiration, this particular "occasion," Catullus has not very much to say, at least not in his accustomed modes of speaking.

THE POET'S ISOLATION AND THE ISOLATING PERFORMANCE OF POETRY

C. 68(a)'s emphasis on the difference between Verona and Rome may, then, encode a kind of poetic difficulty on Catullus's part, with the problem of expression compounded by the complex interference between any location experienced or desired by him as a potential setting and his brother's actual final resting place at Troy. It is as if Troy, a mere accident of fact in his life, has entered into his poetry uninvited, where it severely limits his scope for invention, fictionalization, or witty

irony. The literal displacement of the brother's final location thus entails a poetic disorientation for Catullus. He is not so much committed to a purpose here as trapped in a certain kind of performance. Bereft of part of his own poetic agency, the poet would seem to be subjected to a nightmarish version of what Fitzgerald has called "the poet's isolation": "for the duration of his performance the reciting poet falls out of circulation and seems to exist in another world, separated from the audience before him."⁴⁴

If this is true for even ordinary poems, it is more pronounced in poems treating death. Catullus is far away from wonted society, says that he has brought but little of that society's culture with him, and repeatedly emphasizes his inability now to take part in either that society or its culture by responding to requests for poetry. He cannot at this point figure himself, as before, as performer and his addressee(s) as audience. The death poems deepen that sense of separation by centering around the fact that the audience, more truly the brother than Mallius (in c. 68[a] and c. 68[b]) or Hortalus (in c. 65, discussed later), is itself the subject of a decisive, indeed irrevocable separation. A consequence is that in these cases what Fitzgerald calls the "duration of [the] performance" is permanent. C. 68(a) thus vividly illustrates what Catullus means when he says in c. 65 that he "shall *always* sing songs stricken by [his brother's] death": as he says in c. 101 the "goodbye is *forever*" (respectively v. 12: *semper maesta tua carmina morte canam*; and v. 10: *atque in perpetuum, frater, aue atque uale*).⁴⁵

We may emphasize the poet's personal feeling of inadequacy in this connection by returning to c. 68(a)'s vv. 25–26, where there is also doubled, like the reference to motion, and likewise recurrent at the poem's conclusion a reference to "mind." The Latin has both *mens* and *animus*. The latter can also mean "heart" or "soul"; as such it joins with *ego* to draw attention to the speaking subject as he is more truly an experiencing subject at the present moment. As we have seen, Catullus's experience is disorienting both literally, involving change of place and its significance, and figuratively, in that he is not his usual poetic self. As we saw in earlier chapters, however, Catullus's poetic self is open to a wider range of attitudes toward poetry than the poems' own first impression, of occasional or offhand inspiration, would suggest. In particular Catullus is capable of deep thought about the possibilities and the limits of poetry. It is from this somewhat more disinterested perspective that, toward the conclusion of c. 68(a), Catullus hopes that

Mallius will not decide that Catullus is not “*doing this*,” failing to write an erotic poem, as a result of “ill will” or “uncongenial spirit” (vv. 37–38: *nolim statuas nos mente maligna / id facere aut animo non satis ingenuo*).

In the Latin, “*id facere*” here recalls a similar claim about the poet’s unexercised will in c. 85: “I hate and I love. Perhaps you ask why *I do this*” (v. 1: *odi et amo. quare id faciam fortasse requiris*). Although it cannot be proven, I have the feeling that c. 85 precedes c. 68(a): I am moved by the possibility that c. 68(a), in echoing c. 85, quietly emphasizes Catullus’s refusal from erotic poetry by recalling how such poetry has, for him, already been compromised by lost or absent love, by desire, as well as by the poet’s complicity, productive for poetry, in his own hurt feelings. This conflicted feeling would then appear in c. 68(a), where the best or most erotic Catullus can do is to recall the location of an earlier sexual liaison with Lesbia. In the context of displacements, it is worth emphasizing that already at the time of the liaison that location was borrowed and so would necessarily mean a kind of dislocation. As a result, any “eroticism” in c. 68(a) is in a way also borrowed, a pale sort of desire only for what is literally absent or distant.

NONLINEARITY AND POST-EROTIC POETRY: EROS AND THANATOS

As it seems to lack all loverly feeling, the pale, technical kind of desire represented in c. 68(a) would seem to drain poetry of the very possibilities for fiction in which we have seen Catullus characteristically delight. Instead of being able to speak in response to sociocultural silences that are amenable to fictionalization in poems, Catullus is stymied by a natural silence whose absolute meaninglessness would seem to brook no meaningful response. We could call the resultant death poems post-erotic. We would, I think, not be too far off to identify them, paradoxically, as also post-poetic: Catullus seeks in vain to escape the confines established by the factual accident of his brother’s death at Troy and thus to escape from the poetic tradition begun by Homer—a tradition centered around displacement, absence, and death. Ordinarily Catullus’s poems are rather more recombinant in their meanings. Thus Miller usefully refers to the collection’s “defiant nonlinearity”: “the intricate web of allusion, cross referencing, and implied narrative, which keeps the reader of the Catullan collection ever charting new paths of interpretive meaning, is defiantly nonlinear, and ultimately resists all spatial metaphors in its temporal complexity.”⁴⁶

In the current context, by contrast, we may say that the poetry’s

“defiant nonlinearity” is drastically limited by the death of Catullus’s brother. In particular, as we have seen, the death’s insistent location in space both lies outside Catullus’s wonted domain and draws him toward itself: both are powerful displacements. If Troy is where a certain poetry began, with Homer, for Catullus it is in a way where poetry of the sort he himself has preferred must stop and the poet grow silent. This is not to argue against Miller’s identification of the collection as “dialogic” but rather to emphasize how not all paths through the collection can seem equally possible from the perspective and the position of every subject, including the poet himself as speaking subject.⁴⁷ The poetry may begin again only for readers who have the freedom to move through the collection in a nonlinear way. The author and his persona are denied that freedom not only by history, for of course the collection outlives and constrains them, but also by their changed relationship to place, especially their new relationship to Troy. Located so precisely, they are able to see only a single, perpetually gloomy future.

Discussion of c. 101 in chapter 5 will help us to see further how the desire for what is dead and gone, distant, “always” (*semper*) and “forever” (*in perpetuum*), overpowers interest in the fellow yet-living, what is present. In the meantime, we may say that poems of this sort are paradoxically disorienting for the speaker insofar as they center his desire around an object that is properly impossible to obtain: the dead. Going far beyond the sorts of unrequited love comprised by traditional love elegy, including “love as painful servitude” (*seruitium amoris*; e.g., Ov. *Am.* 1.2.17–18) or even “military service” (*militat omnis amans*; e.g., Ov. *Am.* 1.9.1 and v. 2), this sort of desire is in a way both post-erotic—as we have seen, there is no question in Catullus’s poems of sexual desire for the dead—and post-poetic, as it seems to outstrip the expressive capacity of traditional poetic genres (love elegy, epic).⁴⁸ For the desiring poet, the problem of expression is thus doubled: both the desired dead and his own poetry used to be richly communicative; now neither responds as he would want. As an unresponsive addressee, the desired dead seems to take the poet’s own language with him into that absolute, natural silence. All being lost, or on the verge of being lost, the result is an elegiac poetry indeed.

In this way the death poems effectively link Eros, the principle of desire, and Thanatos, the death principle or even a desire for death. Whereas death may once have seemed undesirable—we note that Catullus does not really treat historical deaths aside from his brother’s—now it commands the poet’s attention. To see the effect of this on Catullus

more clearly, we may contrast the image of fruitless desire for what has been lost in c. 8. There Catullus enjoins himself to “stop with inelegant wretchedness and [to] consider it lost, what [he] se[es] has passed” (vv. 1–2: *miser Catulle, desinas ineptire / et quod uides perisse perditum ducas*). Of course he cannot, for the moment of composition discovers itself as relentlessly desirous, even sensual, still. The injunction’s most frequent form, *obdura(t)* (vv. 11, 12, 19, always the line end), often translated as something like “endure,” means literally “stay hard.” Just possibly, then, it evokes a desire, on the part of this fairly sexual poet, to remain in a traditionally hypermasculine mode, “staying erect.”⁴⁹ But this, too, Catullus cannot do. Instead he seems sincerely to desire rather feminized activity that is, if here only by implication, softer: the very oral activity that has gotten him accused, as we have seen in c. 16, of being soft or unmanly and impious or unchaste, namely, kissing and talking, here alongside biting.

Thus c. 8’s final movement, just ahead of its stop-short coda (*destinatus obdura*), represents the speaking subject as having undergone an inevitable progression. Despite himself, he moves from invective thoughts about Lesbia’s “life” and “love” generally (v. 15: *quae tibi manet uita?*; v. 17: *quem nunc amabis?*) to involving thoughts about her lovable attributes in particular. In line with what we have considered in chapter 2, these are emphatically oral: Lesbia’s kisses (v. 18: *quem basiabis?*) and her penchant for biting lips (v. 18: *cui labella mordebis?*).⁵⁰ The moment of transition from pseudo-invective to helpless desire likewise precisely juxtaposes “love” and “speech” (v. 17: *quem nunc amabis? cuius esse diceris?*). The active “love” (Lesbia is the agent, who will love) and the passive “speech” (she is the patient, who will be spoken about) both exclude Catullus and so figure him as active only in his desire. In contrast to certain passivities that are valuable to the composing poet, this is a weak sort of activity that leaves Catullus in an inelegant (*ineptire*) position.

This sort of failure, however, only dimly prefigures what is worse than inelegant action in love or art, worse than failing to meet the shifting standards by which such trifles are evaluated. It goes without saying, but is worth emphasizing, that one is put into a position of greater permanence, with far too little opportunity to exercise the poetic imagination, when one’s potential interlocutor is unresponsive not for reasons of taste or dislike but because of death. With the internal chronology of the collection uncertain, it may be that the erotic poems are to be read in the darkening light of the death poems; this would seem to

apply especially to those that, like c. 8, figure loverly desire as already compromised by a sense of unstoppably passing time. Whatever the chronology, in the death poems Eros, which otherwise seems to be at the speaking subject's disposal, is dislocated from the living and, as it were, attracted to Thanatos. Catullus thus feels the mute fact of his brother's death overpowering even the possibility of eloquent fictions.

C. 68(A) AND THE PROBLEM OF EXPRESSION

On its own, c. 8 develops a contrast between the shining suns of the poet's traditionally "erotic" (i.e., sexual-desirous) past and the implicit dark of his merely "desirous" present. From our current perspective, such a contrast could be viewed as fulfilling the prediction of c. 5: "suns can set and rise again, / but when our brief light has set, we must sleep one everlasting night" (vv. 4–6: *soles occidere et redire possunt; / nobis cum semel occidit brevis lux / nox est perpetua una dormienda*). How much darker, then, must be the perpetual present of the death poems, and how much starker their contrast with the bright life Catullus shared with his brother, whose love nourished all of Catullus's joys (68[a].23–24: *gaudia nostra, / quae tuus in uita dulcis alebat amor*). Not for nothing, then, does c. 65 promise poetry that is perpetually gloomy. We may say that it is in a poetic kind of everlasting night that Catullus finds himself after his brother's death. In a way similar to how speech and silence converge in the sublime meaninglessness of death, at this emotional depth even seemingly opposed desires run together.⁵¹ The death poems thus seem quietly to disclose how, at a furthest extreme, all desire involves death: even if not expressly for it, desire is aware of death awaiting.

In this connection, we may note that, in contrast to certain "romantic" or other subject-centered poetries, none of the poems in the collection seems to figure Catullus, or for that matter any speaker, as wishing for his (or her) own death. While a death wish may be tacit, it seems that the sort of lyric subjectivity developed by Catullus rather wishes always to be able to speak in various ways. This wish may take ironic forms, including sophisticated positions of relative exclusion or isolation. To quote Fitzgerald again: "For the duration of his performance the reciting poet falls out of circulation and seems to exist in another world, separated from the audience before him." As a result, certain of the poems "remind us of what poetry cannot do, of a writing that it cannot transcribe, of a kind of speech that must be lost when poetic speech begins."⁵² As we have seen, Catullus's own metapoetic awareness of this situation, of the fact that poetry entails a silence of certain kinds of

speech, means a poetics of silence in which certain silences are indeed highly valued by the poet as the very conditions of his poetry's possibility. But those desired silences are largely sociocultural. By contrast, as the poet prefers for certain kinds of speech to continue, he does not generally wish for natural silence. It would be a rare ancient poet who prefers, for example, the silence of the wilderness, perhaps too suggestive of the absence of language in exile. Catullus in particular therefore clearly does not wish for the silence of a beloved interlocutor, like his brother, in death, and nowhere does he seem to wish for his own, similarly permanent silence.

The great difference between what all speakers wish for, namely, speech as part of responsive conversation, and what all speakers ultimately get, namely, silence as the complete absence of turn taking, is, then, a crucial part of Catullus's poetics. Several poems that depict a speaker on the verge of (not) getting his or her wish due to certain, seemingly sociocultural silences are discussed further later. In the meantime, we may return to c. 68(a) with all of this in mind. While Mallius may be bored, Catullus is more deeply unable to muster any of his wonted interest in pleasure including "love affairs" (*delicias*).⁵³ As the poem takes its turn in an ongoing epistolary conversation, taking advantage of an interlocutor's expectant silence, it therefore figures turn taking as reaching its natural and undesirable conclusion. Likewise, as the poem figures itself as an utterance in affective but ineffectual response to a natural silence, the brother's, it imagines the poet coming to grips, however weakly, with the difference between what poetry makes or does and what will remain in the end. Poetry makes or does speech. In the end there can be only silence.

We may say, then, that c. 68(a) develops a doubled image of Catullus's own undesired and undesirable silence. On the one hand, there is the delay in Catullus's response to Mallius and what he represents as its changed or reduced quality. Catullus represents this relative silence in conversation as somewhat unconventional, or at least incompletely determined by genre, and obviously freighted with emotion. On the other hand, there is his uncertainty about whether to speak about the cause of his uncharacteristic behavior, his brother's death, and if so what to say. Indeed, there is uncertainty about the full range of modalities in this regard: what *can* or *may* or *should* be said about such an event? On display, then, is the poet's aporia: displaced from "home" in various senses, dwelling on where his brother is stuck in place, he does not know where to turn or how to turn away. As a result c. 68(a) purports

mainly to report a kind of silence on Catullus's part; instead of composing a new poem, he can only translate.

Taken together, these two silences suggest a deep consideration of how conversation is limited by the conventional. When even witty conversation depends on shared language in conversation, there are real limits to what can be spoken about in even the unconventional discourse constituted as "overheard" by Catullus's self-consciously innovative poems. In particular here, the elaborate conventions of urbane conversation seem unable to allow for expressions beyond a certain point of emotional range or depth. The death of Catullus's brother and the undeniability—the unironizability—of its consequential and attendant silences have a force, and bring about a feeling, that cannot adequately be expressed. We cannot say that they "figure" the limits of language. Rather they *are* its limits and reveal that even—especially?—the poet, with his command of tradition and innovation, is in the end defined severely.

The problem of expression is, then, much more serious than Mallius's bad luck in love and consequent request for new, old-style love poems. The fault is not Mallius's, nor indeed any human agent's, including the poet's. Such an absolute, natural silence as death imposes makes a mockery of human agency. The poet's incapacity is not natural but only a matter of accident; as his household has been reduced, so his range has been limited. As we have seen, Catullus uses conventional images of shipwreck and drowning. There are also hardly noticeable transferred epithets in phrases like "a household buried," when it is the brother whose ash has been buried, and "broken goods," which stand for Catullus's broken heart. But even these seem to be examples of how poetic language is incrementally drained of its creative power, its power to fictionalize, when confronted with an ineluctable fact.

AN UNDISGRACEFUL SILENCE

Catullus speaks most vividly in c. 68(a) when he speaks straightforwardly. He only quietly corrects Mallius's use of shipwreck metaphor: it is inappropriate not absolutely but only in the event. Likewise, the "breaking" of goods caused by Catullus's brother, *freg-isti* ("you have broken"; v. 21) also overpowers—drowns out?—the image of Mallius "broken with his ship," *nau-frag-um* (he is a "broken-ship-man"; v. 3). Catullus is also quite moderate in response to what we may infer was Mallius's description of Catullus's failure to send erotic poems as "a disgrace" (*turpe*). We know from other poems, like c. 6, that seemingly

negative evaluative terms like *turpe* can serve as ironic markers of positive interaction among friends, and so we may suspect that Mallius's use of that term would have been within the bounds of his and Catullus's ordinary banter. If this is right, it is only accidentally, not essentially, that Mallius is mistaken and therefore quietly and even gently that Catullus corrects him: he writes that the situation is not "disgraceful" but rather "miserable" or "pitiable" (v. 30: *id, Mani, non est turpe, magis miserum est*). Here there is no outrage, much less outrageous violation of linguistic taboos. The poet still speaks, but it is as if with the volume turned down. If only lament were enough.

On this reading, Catullus is polite to Mallius in part because with him he is still able to have an actual conversation. Although turn taking and, therefore, a kind of silence is involved, this is I would say a long way from Catullus loving Flavius's silence as an opportunity for his own outrageous speech. Here he is dislocated or displaced, well past the point of being able to be moved by what otherwise would have been an ordinary request, even a charming continuation of an ongoing poetic and/or epistolary conversation. He has been moved—broken, put to flight from his broken home, even drowned—by that very different kind of turn in conversation that is, in his experience as figured in the poems, extraordinary. His brother's death and absolute silence are Catullus's major encounter, as represented in the poems, with an actual sublime. The death constitutes something that is unspeakable *unironically*. As Catullus himself could have said, it is not that "this is not shameful to say" (*hoc non pudet fateri*, to vary c. 6), as if the problem were insufficient opportunity for wit. Instead "this cannot be said" (*hoc non potest fateri*). Not only witty utterance but all utterance seems to fail.

As Catullus does in fact say, the situation "isn't disgraceful, rather pitiable, and so deserves [Mallius's] pardon" as being a matter not of Catullus's ill will but of his "incapacity," his severely limited agency: "what grief has taken from me, I can't give to you as a gift" (vv. 30–32: *id, Mani, non est turpe, magis miserum est. / ignoscas igitur si, quae mihi luctus ademit, / haec tibi non tribuo munera, cum nequeo*). To speak metaphorically, it is as if Catullus has received two letters simultaneously. One is from Mallius, which may be answered but whose answer would be, at this moment, unmeaningful. The other is from, or about, his brother and may not be answered, although of course it ought to be: for there would be meaning . . . but there, precisely, can be none from this point onward.

We may thus read c. 68(a) as a turn taking indeed, but one taking place in a conversation that is unwanted by the speaker because it is set

against a backdrop of unwanted silences. One silence is sociocultural and ordinarily desirable, that is, the silence opened up at the end of Mallius's letter. This is unwanted by the poet now because of his own changed circumstances. The other is natural, thoroughly undesirable, unanswerable: the absolute silence of his brother in death. In a way we have come to expect from Catullus's poetics of silence, there is, then, more to c. 68(a) than Catullus's refusal to write something sexy for Mallius since he is, for perfectly understandable reasons, not in the mood. Through no fault of his own, Mallius's dissatisfactions with love and love poetry pale into mere irony in light of Catullus's feeling of being more sincerely or truly displaced in language. Not only the tone of Mallius's letter, which evidently reaches for a humorous sort of melodrama, but also its imagery is inappropriate by accidental contrast. The shipwrecked sailor of versified love, lovelorn and bored in his ship of a bed, is too *louche*, not to say *gauche*, in contrast to the real bereavement that has in fact involved a sea voyage. As Catullus struggles to respond to this complex arrangement of facts and fictions, we may indeed overhear the silence—undisgraceful as well as unwanted—against which c. 68(a) imagines its reading aloud.

The Fact of Troy and the Impossibility of Catullan Epic

In the next chapter we will consider the other death poems in some detail; a special focus will be on c. 101. I would like to conclude this chapter by considering some of what we might call poetic and philosophical ramifications of how Catullus's poetics of silence responds to the absolute, natural silence of death. As I hear him, Catullus takes seriously, and expects his readers likewise to take seriously, the details of the metapoetic claim made in c. 68(a), according to which love poetry in particular is refused and poetry, speech, or utterance more generally become problematic.⁵⁴ In the face of overpowering silence, even the poet, the exemplary language user, seems to have at his disposal only dissatisfying modes of expression, including—to return to Rilke—inarticulate lament. As the speaking subject of the death poems, then, Catullus is a changed man indeed. Although I do not mean to argue for a development in his person over time, I would nonetheless say that given his brother's death Catullus is no longer able to hear in silence, as he used to, an opportunity for his own outrageous speech. In a sort of direct inversion of his erotic interest in uncountability, his capacity for

speech has been limited by a single fact, one that is all too countable. The obviousness of that fact means that Catullus cannot even rumor-monger, much less poeticize with wit and charm. Instead he has been reduced to a kind of historiography.⁵⁵

This different sort of attention to detail has been exemplified especially in reference to the brother's death at Troy. Since Troy is a metonym for epic, it is a kind of "general" place that the poet may choose, for his or her own various reasons, to occupy or to ignore. Of course Catullus and his fellow "neoterics" are known to have dispreferred old-fashioned epic precisely.⁵⁶ What an unfunny irony, then, for Troy to have become a "particular" place in Catullus's personal experience. As Fitzgerald puts it, "Troy, for centuries the most literary of places [is] now, suddenly, the scene of personal tragedy."⁵⁷ On this reading, it is as the place representing the very negation and violation of his personal and poetic agency that Catullus describes Troy as "irreligious," *nefas*; "bitter," *acerba*; "obscene," *obscena*; "unlucky" or even "ill-starred," *infelice* (all c. 68[b]). None of these strongly evaluative adjectives form part of Catullus's wonted "language of social performance." By contrast, several of them are obviously drawn from religious language. All together they suggest an experience beyond anything the poet or his language had known or would have preferred to know.

We may yet wonder why Catullus as a poet did not push further into describing this sort of experience. On the one hand, this could seem a failure of Callimachean poetics convincingly to address important aspects of reality. In terms of a poetics of silence, it seems that this has much to do with Catullus's interest in seeming to be overheard as only one member of a conversation. In the absence of a response, a poem's addressee or dedicatee perhaps too closely approximates the dead and their absolute silence. To illustrate this, we may briefly consider c. 36 (discussed more fully in chapter 3).⁵⁸ In c. 68(a), we have only Catullus's report of Mallius's letter, as in c. 36 we had only the poet's description of Lesbia's vow. The report, like that description, seems designed to cast Catullus's response in the better light. In comparison to both interlocutors, Catullus is cleverer. What matters most is the difference in circumstance and therefore tone. If c. 36 was ironic, affecting a learned and therefore witty mock-solemnity, in c. 68(a) there is irony but no mockery, as Catullus juxtaposes Mallius's perfectly ordinary request with his own extraordinary, unacceptable situation. In c. 36, event or situation allowed Catullus to answer Lesbia in a way that strictly exceeded her explicit expectations but that, however, plausibly matched the expecta-

tions implicit in such a lively conversation: Catullus could joke because, in his view at least, Lesbia's own vow was not serious. In c. 68(a), by contrast, both event and location conspire against what Mallius would, in a way similar to Lesbia, reasonably have expected of Catullus in his typical fine conversational and compositional form.

Thus compared, cc. 36 and 68(a) figure the positive and negative valences of irony in the context of vows or promises made to others. In the most general terms, they and poems like them figure social or interpersonal expectation. In c. 36, it was fine for Catullus to treat gods and poems as tokens for human exchange, it being unproblematic that the gods in particular would receive nothing (or nothing of value). The vow is therefore mock-serious. By contrast, in c. 68(a) Catullus feels in a very different way the fact that he cannot answer a request that, however similarly mock-serious or ironical, is reasonable indeed by virtue of it being between people. As Catullus puts it: "What grief has taken from me, I can't give to you as a gift" (vv. 31–32: *quae mihi luctus ademit, / haec tibi non tribuo munera*). This very negative feeling about living up to expectation, doing one's duty including gift giving, is a powerful theme in the death poems. From this perspective, the link that is imagined between youthful vigor in love and composition of love poetry (vv. 15–20) fails. As a result Catullus feels unable to compose love poetry, whereas other poetry is possible if—as we will see also in c. 101—ineffective and therefore dissatisfying.⁵⁹ For poetry to be composed at this point is then heavily ironic but, again, neither charming nor witty.

THE HUMAN COST OF EPIC

When combined with Catullus's poetics, this situation may hint at a reason for why there is no full-scale Catullan epic, only these shorter pieces. A Callimachean or Hellenistic preference for shorter poetry notwithstanding, to my mind the more persuasive argument against composing a fiction centered around "undying fame" is indeed the uncomfortably close association between the general site of epic as such, Troy, and the particular, accidental fact of Catullus's brother's death. The need for remembrance implies that something has passed, and in the case of the brother this is felt more deeply than may be expressed even in innovative poetry, much less in the more traditional cultural practices that are, for aesthetic reasons, already disliked. In the closest Catullus comes to a full-scale epic, c. 64, he is able to give voice to certain of the costlier aspects of the epic world and its sequence of events, including especially the somewhat hidden cost to the hero in human

terms.⁶⁰ At that poem's center, Ariadne laments her abandonment by Theseus, whose story she furthered with highest personal hopes and so in the event at great personal cost. At the poem's end, the celebration of Thetis and Peleus's wedding is marked ironically or even dissonantly by how the Fates' wedding song focuses on the couple's child-to-be, Achilles . . . and the rivers he will choke with human bodies and blood.

There are implications here that Catullus, I would say, well understood, but he seems not to have been able to say them aloud.⁶¹ It is as if he could not extricate himself, as a person, from the act of writing poems enough to be able to document, as a persona, his experience of the hollow good of epic.⁶² His own voice is tired, and if previously a Muse has been present, as he says explicitly he has driven her to flight. On this reading, in the existing death poems Catullus is attempting to respond to death in ways that do not draw on epic. In c. 68(a) he is able to speak indirectly by approaching the topic through another and, simultaneously, by speaking about his dead brother to another, living man. In this way a sign system is best built up literally around the absence, the system's lineaments serving to delineate, as it were, a negative image of the absence, that is a positive image of lingering presence or memory. The presence cannot literally be recuperated, and literally or linguistically the gap can never fully be filled, so the shapes of both personal presence and linguistic problem are traced simultaneously around their edges. This results in a furiously written silence, one that acknowledges a natural silence without building on it, for such a silence is felt to provide the most unstable of foundations for speech.

POST-EROTIC POETRY AND OBLIGATORY GIFTS

It may be too much to think of Catullus as developing here a poetic language on the order of modern negative theology or ancient mystery cult, or as thinking "aloud" via poetic composition and recomposition including translation. Certainly he is thoughtful. Much less certainly is he systematic, and it seems clear that he is not "religious" in this connection, or is ritualistic only superficially, since he must be. Although there is an apophatic quality to the idea that language is insufficient for certain representations, in Catullus this is not a matter of principle, theory, or even poetics so much as it is a result of experience and practice. His own poetics of silence is put primarily in the service of speaking outrageously aloud or of disclosure via witty irony. Catullus always wants to speak in full enjoyment of speech as conversation, of conversa-

tion between two people. In this poetics even silence, when it is socio-cultural, is a sign of shared life.

From this perspective, any *jouissance* to an outrageously silencing poem like c. 6 is revealed to be dependent on the continued possibility of conversation, a "turn taking" that involves alternating speech and silence. By contrast, the death of Catullus's brother results in a natural, absolute silence that does not conduce to witty poetry. The permanent absence of a former interlocutor results in quite seriously mixed emotions. (We will see that Catullus can respond to a friend's loss with what seems to be similar seriousness.) Instead of a pleasurable opportunity to exercise the poetic imagination, there is a disturbing isolation from language and meaning. Catullus's wonted mode of lyric monologue is a clever poetic dominance of conversation. The more he is left adrift, the more such monologue is revealed as unresponsive soliloquy. When desired interlocutors *cannot* any longer respond, his poetry becomes indeed post-erotic. Speech is no longer a question of desire; if there is to be any sound at all, Catullus cannot *want* to speak: he *must*. In this context poetry itself becomes a dissatisfyingly obligatory gift.

First Conclusions about Ultimate Silence

A poet like Catullus, sensitive as we have seen to the possibilities of silence, is at risk of hearing in every temporary silence or pause the ultimate silence of death. Implicit in the most successful poetry is therefore a worst feeling: for a voicing of immortality in culture to be heard, all that might otherwise sound, including other human utterance, must be silenced. This is reflected in ancient ritual, in which sacred speech is protected against profanation: "aid the ritual with your [silenced] tongues" (*fauete linguis*). Such a sacred space is achieved by displacing human beings, especially, from their language. There is a way, then, in which the sociocultural silence insisted on by poetry as an utterance serves to signify the natural, absolute silence of death. For the ancient poet, this paradox may result in a personal irony: he or she feels compelled to compose, as if to speak aloud, but has reason to doubt whether poems are of truly lasting value or meaning, to doubt whether the voice will in fact be heard.

As Janan observes regarding c. 68(a): "Catullus experiences attachment to an object, and loss of that object, so radical that it temporarily

abolishes the very possibility of metonymy; his delight in words, in writing poetry, cannot work to assuage the loss by substituting for the brother-as-object."⁶³ There is a feeling here, then, of a man rejecting his comforts, for their having offended simply by being what remains. Perhaps especially when his poetry is read aloud, a poet like Catullus, exquisitely attuned to silence as well as other sense perceptions, hears in the voice his own passing. How completely can a given poem's persona represent the voice of the historical person? How distinct can it keep that voice from the sound produced by the reader?

In a way, the poet risks enabling his or her own absolute silence. To take the paragon as an example, that there has been one Homer, received and recited rhapsodically, his burial place contested among various cities, is a factual miracle. The idea that there could be another such poet, whose voice alone saves him or her from absolute silence, is at best a dizzying aspiration; from this near side of literary history, it may even seem a specious fiction. In this connection we may recall that Ennius, the first serious claimant in Latin to poetic immortality, is reported to have staked his claim on being a resurrection of Homer. The implication is that all successful epic poetry, at least, belongs to that first poet in a lineal, almost literal way.⁶⁴ When Ennius sings, then, we are meant to hear Homer. As a result, Ennius "himself" is silenced. Going further, we remember that Homer had Achilles to sing of. Whereas Alexander the Great might envy Achilles his "herald" as guaranteeing immortality in culture, the poet rather envies Homer his glorious subject matter.⁶⁵ Admiration, aspiration, and envy are thus close together at the heart of the Latin term for Ennius's and later poets' activity, *aemulatio*, something like "competitive imitation."⁶⁶

The combination of aspiration and envy is thus the composing poet's stock and trade. For Catullus, entrant to high Roman society and seemingly confident in his poetic talent, envy comes in the form of a sort of ironic or sophisticated comeuppance. Confronted with that ultimate or finalizing fact of life, he seems to feel that life might be—but paradoxically could not have been—better spent. In other words, in poems about death Catullus may be heard as quietly acknowledging that there is not enough time.⁶⁷ The acknowledgment is best quiet, indeed, since in a way language is part of the problem: it may misrepresent and go unanswered. And yet in ancient culture, it is language, however untrustworthy, that must be counted on, ruefully, to transcribe the breaths and other pauses that structure human utterance. With silence always on its way, the reading aloud of written words is all that will remain.

From this perspective, we would see Catullus at his most philosophical, if philosophy is defined, after Socrates and Plato, as answering the question, "How to live the best life?" with, "By preparing for death." The poet as philosopher of utterance and silence has the sense that poems, no matter how much they might seem to make or do, evoke our ultimate silence.

POST-EROTIC IMMORTALITY IN CULTURE?

At the same time, each poem may be counted as an attempt to respond to that silence, if not to break it. Poetry is an ancient archetype of impossible (divinely inspired, maddened) but actual human activity whose notional beginnings, in Homer and others to be considered here, are figured precisely as referring to and rising from certain signal deaths. We have already encountered the feeling that Alexander the Great got it backward: while the general envies Achilles his fortunate possession of Homer, the aspirant poet must envy Homer his Achilles. For of course it is Achilles's death that makes possible the *Iliad* and therefore Homer's own immortality in culture: his "glory" or, etymologically, his "being-heard-of." We may note that the feeling here was more important than the fact: Homer as we have him does not narrate Achilles's death directly. Instead he reports the consequences of Achilles's famous decision to die young and therefore gloriously, immortalized in public discourse, instead of living out a life of greater length in domesticated obscurity. We may also note that, when Achilles has withdrawn from the war, he is found to be playing the lyre and singing songs about heroes (*Il.* 9.223–39). Depicted thus, Achilles is not a poet so much as a rhapsode or perhaps something in between, embodying an aggressively leisurely consumption—a conspicuously high-cultural posture—of poetic performance. There is thus a connection, deep in the literary tradition, between (one's) death and (one's own) relationship to poetry. Achilles's beloved companion, Patroclus, listens to the songs in silence (*v.* 229); we know that he is doomed to die.

Alongside Homer, the originator of epic, we may consider the originary figure of poetry more generally, Orpheus.⁶⁸ Orpheus was famous for his thoroughly moving music; with it he secured an audience before the chthonic gods, then animated and silenced in awe the natural world, which even now continues to echo his music and words. For his greatest poetic achievements, moving the rocks and plants, he drew on his beloved Eurydice's recent (second) death. His music is moving most of all when unbearably particular about that most general eventuality:

Orpheus sings Eurydice's name. As a result his audience members are deeply attracted to him; when their attraction is unmet, they tear him to pieces.⁶⁹ Thus Orpheus's most powerful music centers around death. Since he is the originary type of the poet, it can follow that ancient poetry more generally likewise centers around death.

We may round out this quick survey of originary figures with Echo. Perhaps the extreme incarnation of imitative or mimetic art, Echo figures the reflective surface as it suggests artistic contemplation including poetry. In a way, she may suggest that an image is indexical of its object, for her inner life, which humanist tradition would identify as her "person," is not to be distinguished from her lingering voice, which of course is all that remains. Not for nothing, then, that in one story does her beloved Narcissus fall for his reflection: believing it to be speaking with Echo's voice, which repeats his own words, he falls through the surface of the reflection to his own death (*Ov. Met.* 3.339–401). In another story explaining echoes, Echo is quite similar to Orpheus: spurning the attentions of Pan, she is torn to pieces by his shepherd followers; hidden in the earth, her pieces cause the world to imitate sounds (*Longus* 3.23). Both stories are images of how one's own language proves insufficient, in isolation from partnership with other voices, even for survival, much less for immortality in culture. What does this mean for the poet, who by definition relies on language and, as we have seen, according to tradition relies as well on a kind of imitation of others' voices?

REALITIES BROUGHT TOO STRONGLY TO MIND

These quick, somewhat philosophical evocations of ancient originary figures for poetry and language show how ancient poetry could, like Shakespeare in Samuel Johnson's famous words, "bring realities to mind" (*Preface to Shakespeare*). Johnson has in mind both pain and pleasure: "Imitations produce pain or pleasure, not because they are mistaken for realities, but because they bring realities to mind."⁷⁰ I would say that Catullus knows this, and communicates knowledge of it especially in response to the ultimate silence of death. In a way his response to that natural silence must be similar to how he responds to sociocultural silences: in language. But more important is the difference. Whereas sociocultural silences provide the opportunity for outspoken, often outrageous speech, the natural silence of death seems to defy poeticization.

We may clarify this problematic difference by considering a fourth and final origin story for ancient poetry, one centering around a death

that is, like that of Catullus's brother, apparently not amenable to fictionalization; indeed it would seem to be prohibited. The story I have in mind is Jupiter's overthrow of Saturn. When Jupiter castrates and then kills Saturn, he not only enacts a version of a pervasive ancient creation myth (with shades of the mythological serpent's death as the birth of the world), he also inaugurates a novel political regime. Given a general ancient dislike of political innovation, Jupiter's regime, like any novel politics, could be celebrated only in terms emphasizing its (alleged) conservatism or return to a valued but previously suppressed way of life.

In point of fact, however, the poetic suppression is in the opposite direction: Jupiter's coup, and the rise of the Olympian gods, is to my knowledge never told from the perspective of Saturn and his fellow Titans. There is, for example, no surviving ancient tragedy set in the transitional household of the gods.⁷¹ One may be forgiven for thinking, then, that there is something politically quite convenient, even shrewd, in poetry and art coming under the purview of the Muses, for these goddesses are the children of Saturn and Mnemosyne, the personification of memory. In a way, then, the Muses are thus collectively the mouthpiece of the Jovian regime, and the poetry they inspire serves to give voice to the regime's claim of somehow being both new and everlasting (*sempiternal*). In this context, not only might a single human death seem meaningless, but the poetry most traditionally available to celebrate it, epic, might seem disingenuous or even dishonest. "Whoever tells such stories keeps more quiet" indeed.

Whatever is made of this particular suggestion, the general situation is that traditional genres seem inadequate for the representation of certain experiences and for the expression of certain emotions. When the poet raises his voice against death; when, then, he rails against the realization that his voice is inadequate and tattered, and sees that all his sophisticated charm, wit, and irony are ultimately meaningless, as worthless as the moralizing gossip of severe and fatally unsexy old men; when he sees, precisely, that all human activity can be worth no more than, not a penny, but two coins for the ferryman: then we may hear him wondering, What sort of poetry might there have been under Saturn?⁷² If Echo had had a better, more verbal inspiration than Narcissus? If Orpheus had not turned around? What sort of songs might Achilles have performed on his lyre had he chosen happiness and obscurity? To return to our author, What might Catullus have gone on to write had his brother not died as he did?

By asking these sorts of questions we stand to overhear a poet of Catullus's sensitivity recognizing, and quietly admitting, that there can indeed be no poetry, as it has been said, after Auschwitz . . . because the saying is somewhat malformed. There has always been an Auschwitz of sorts, a holocaust in the ancient sense of a burnt offering, a sacrifice. There has always been a death, a cessation of life breath against which the poet's own utterance and insistence on silence must seem—at the moment of his belated recognition—both a tragedy of diminished means and a true obscenity.⁷³ Catullus's discovery, like Rilke's, is that lament is *not* enough, not nearly, because poetry is not enough and too much for meaningful speech. Under Jove's regime, after Echo's and Orpheus's dismemberments, in light of Achilles's decision and Homer's derivative creation, after Catullus's brother's death: it seems that lament is, ultimately, all we language users, we poets and readers of poems, may have.

5

The Natural Silence of Death, Part 2

Cc. 65 and 101 (with 96, 100, and 102)

... and address the mute ash in vain ...

101.4: *et mutam nequiquam alloquerer cinerem*

Reading c. 68(a) in the context of c. 65, we have seen Catullus confront a situation that is intolerable in light of his poetics of silence: whereas the poet seeks to produce charming or witty poetry in response to the sorts of sociocultural silences that characterize ordinary social interaction, he is, like any ordinary language user, stymied by the natural silence of death. As a formerly potential interlocutor is permanently silenced, death quite naturally represents an interruption of conversation, the *sermo* that was considered perhaps the most essential function of human language and the very expression of human being-in-language. The result of death is a silence that, in a way unlike all others, does not seem to conceal a story that may be told in poetry. For the poet who aims to be overheard saying just such tacit things aloud, the effect is a profound disorientation. Faced with the absolute, natural silence of death, the poet finds not only his expertise but also his efficacy as a language user called into question. Since mastery of language is, in a way, the very reason for his being, his agency, too, is called into question.

Janan puts a fine point on this situation as it applies to Catullus in c. 65: “The *kenosis* of Catullus’s beloveds in c. 68, their reduction to this or that luminous feature as signifiers in an ongoing discourse of love,

points forward to a palliation of their loss *with other signifiers*—with poetry itself."¹ Such palliation is a function of the capacities of language, not limited to poetry, to equate two things via metaphor and to evoke something via metonymy. As we have seen, although this sort of palliation may result in imagery that is artistic and therefore pleasing to the poet who seeks an artistic expression of emotion, it cannot but be unsatisfactory and insufficient to the person whose emotions are at stake. Since this palliation depends on substitution, it inevitably signifies absence, distance, or displacement. In this way poetry recalls and may actually reinforce the person's feeling of disorientation. Indeed, insofar as poetry is influential enough to set the terms of lived experience, this sort of palliation by substitution risks reifying loss by permanently expressing only desire for what has been lost. Metonymy emphasizes the strict impossibility of desire's fulfillment.

In this connection I have called the death poems "post-erotic," pointing to their subordination of Eros, the principle of desire, to Thanatos, the death principle. Disoriented by his brother's death, Catullus seems to displace his wonted desire for sexual, sexualized, or otherwise lovely experience of a certain joyful breadth onto symbols whose narrower scope suggests the person's and the poet's feelings of limitation. This is a well-recognized feature of Catullus's poetry and other ancient literature. Once again we may quote Janan, who refers here to our crucial c. 65: "Catullus models this odd picture upon his abandoned erotic heroines. . . . Thus the image of an abandoned lover—like Catullus himself—superimposes itself upon the lost brother's image, which in turn floats above the picture of Lesbia as the beautiful goddess. . . . These equations are made possible, in part, by Catullus's fetishistic concentration on representative features—paleness, borders, feet—as metonymic substitutions for his beloved others."² Janan has in mind here a singular image in which Catullus's brother is visualized in terms of his "small, pale foot" (v. 6: *pallidulum . . . pedem*). We consider that image in some detail later in this discussion.

In the meantime, we may say that since Janan writes with psychoanalysis, too, in mind, the problem with "fetishistic concentration" is precisely that such concentration is hardly meaningful. As the fetish is—emphatically or quietly—not the object of the desire it replaces, displacement and disorientation take over. From this perspective, the death poems are not so much responses to the absolute, natural silence of death as attempts to produce concrete substitutes for the stories that are, disquietingly, *not* suggested by that mute silence. Thus we saw

Catullus in c. 68(a) not so much addressing his brother's death directly as seeking to speak around it by addressing *Mallius*. Since such indirection must inevitably dissatisfy by continually reinscribing the speaker's isolation in his unfulfilled desire, such an artfully metonymic response to death risks undermining the poet's belief in the efficacy of poetry. In Catullus this is part of a more general frustration with the expressive capacities of traditional cultural practices, including but not limited to certain forms of poetry.

Perhaps most generally, we may say that the perceived impossibility of carrying on a conversation with the dead unsettles the poet's sense of himself as a language user. Faced with the natural silence of ceased being, neither out of which nor to which there can be any response that is meaningful in the manner of conversation, the poet is compelled to wonder about the meaningfulness of his own being-in-language. Since the capacity to share meanings in language is, in Greek and Roman antiquity, virtually the definition of "human being," at issue in the death poems is, again, Catullus's agency. This is most basically a question of whether and how one may act. In certain poems he makes clear that, in his view, the question applies to us all. What does it mean to speak when, ultimately, one's utterance will be—is—met with silence? From that perspective, does the choice to act in speech, to break or to keep certain sociocultural silences, have a meaning? My main examples for Catullus's articulation of these questions are c. 65, to which we return for a more complete reading than in chapter 4, and the masterpiece that is c. 101. To contextualize certain points I also discuss a final death poem, c. 96, as well as cc. 100 and 102 as they bracket c. 101.

C. 65 and the Poet's Agency

In the context of absolute, natural silence, the poet must speak if there is to be utterance at all. Is he therefore truly responsible for his speech? Or is utterance rather spoken through him and through us, in the process suggesting that the silence on which it depends prefigures the silence to which we must return?

Catullus's artfulness should not be allowed to disguise his deep feeling, in certain poems, that expression is limited by poetry as well as by other cultural practices.³ In other words, although his mastery of poetry allows him to seem to be overheard, he clearly recognizes that semblance for what it is. To my ear his unironic awareness of how poetry allows

only the appearance of spontaneity while in fact constraining agency is audible especially in the death poems. We have already seen an example of this in c. 68(a): "All my youthful zeal for [love and love poetry] has been / stolen away from me in grief at my brother's death. / Oh brother, snatched away from miserable me, you oh you in dying have / shattered my goods, brother, with you my whole household is buried!" (vv. 19–22: *sed totum hoc studium luctu fraterna mihi mors / abstulit. o misero frater adempte mihi, / tu mea tu moriens fregisti commoda, frater, / tecum una tota est nostra sepulta domus*). Catullus goes on to say that, due to his brother's "passing," he has "driven completely from [his] mind this zealous activity and all delights of the soul" (vv. 25–26: *cuius ego interitu tota de mente fugavi / haec studia atque omnes delicias animi*).

In my view, the agency to which this language lays claim (*fugavi*: "I" is the one who has "put things to flight") is a travesty of ownership, indeed of what ought to have been a kind of inalienable possession. As Catullus has lost what ought not to have been losable, so he has been redefined, put into a position that is central to speech but inessential to action: he is active only in his capacity to record experience, but he cannot cause or shape it. Worse, all that he has valued as virtually the definition of himself has been driven away or destroyed. I am therefore prepared to accept Skinner's argument that the death poems, possibly along with the entire *libellus* cc. 65–116, figure Catullus turning away from (Callimachean) poetry and the city toward the remnants of his life as symbolized by Verona. Virtually unrecorded, that later life may well have seemed unrecordable. At this point it is hard to decide whether such a life's unworthiness of undying fame is better or worse than a traditionally "worthy" event like the death of Catullus's brother. The one is unworthy, the other unwished-for, and both expose the limits of Catullus's agency even as a poet, *a fortiori* as a person.

AN EVOCATIVE SIMILE

Catullus's limited agency is vividly represented in c. 65, especially in its concluding simile.⁴

Although anxiety has called me, weary with assiduous pain,
 away from the learned maidens, Hortalus,
 and the mind of my heart is not able to bring forth the sweet
 fruits of the Muses, so great are the evils in which she is tossed—
 for just now has a flowing wave, at the mouth of Lethe,
 lapped at the small, pale foot of my brother,

whom the land of Troy, at the Rhoetean shore,
 grinds down, snatched away from our sight

 never, O brother more beloved than life, shall I 10
 look upon you again? But I shall surely always love you,
 I shall sing songs always gloomy with your death,
 like those beneath the dense shadows of branches
 sung by the Daulian, bewailing the death of her lost Itylus.—
 Despite being in such grief, nevertheless, Hortalus, I send 15
 to you these poems brought forth from the descendant of Battus,
 lest you think, by chance, that your words, entrusted in vain
 to the wandering winds, have flowed out of my heart,
 like an apple, having been sent as a clandestine gift by the betrothed,
 runs forth from the chaste lap of a maiden, 20
 and, having been placed beneath the soft dress of the forgetful,
 pitiable girl,
 when she leaps up at her mother's arrival, is shaken out
 and is driven headlong, falling in a rush,
 and down her gloomy face there flows a guilty blush.

Etsi me assiduo defectum cura dolore
 seuocat a doctis, Hortale, uirginibus,
 nec potis est dulcis Musarum expromere fetus
 mens animi, tantis fluctuat ipsa malis—
 namque mei nuper Lethaeo in gurgite fratris 5
 pallidulum manans alluit unda pedem,
 Troia Rhoeteo quem subter litore tellus
 ereptum nostris obterit ex oculis.

 numquam ego te, uita frater amabilior, 10
 aspiciam posthac? at certe semper amabo,
 semper maesta tua carmina morte canam,
 qualia sub densis ramorum concinit umbris
 Daulias, absumpti fata gemens Ityli.—
 sed tamen in tantis maeroribus, Hortale, mitto 15
 haec expressa tibi carmina Battiadae,
 ne tua dicta uagis nequiquam credita uentis
 effluxisse meo forte putes animo,
 ut missum sponsi furtiuo munere malum
 procurrit casto uirginis e gremio, 20
 quod miserae oblitae molli sub ueste locatum,
 dum aduentu matris prosilit, excutitur,

atque illud prono praeceps agitur decursu,
huic manat tristi conscius ore rubor.

As in c. 68(a), so here Catullus claims that he is unable to respond to an addressee's request for original poetry. Catullus evidently wishes to deny the possibility that the request has slipped his mind (vv. 17–18). In a way that has fascinated readers, however, he goes on to compare his situation to that of a young woman whose forgetfulness or momentary absentmindedness reveals, against her own implicit wish for concealment, that she has taken a lover. This comparison, in the form of an extended simile (vv. 19–24), comes just after Catullus has compared himself, in a first simile, to the nightingale, about to sing songs ever gloomy with his brother's death (vv. 11–14, discussed in chapter 4). In this concluding position the comparison serves to deepen our sense not only of the speaking subject's feeling but also of his understanding of the situation and, crucially, the relationship between poetry and expression. Hortalus is enjoined to accept a translation of Callimachus (c. 66) as a sign that Catullus has not forgotten.⁵ Listening closely, we may hear the difference between original composition and translation as well as the simile as indicating that the relationship between poetry and expression is strained indeed. Catullus has not forgotten Hortalus's request, but that memory pales before the impossibility of forgetting his own brother's death. In this connection, the forthcoming translation, c. 66, is simultaneously a sort of failure to respond to Hortalus's request successfully and, more importantly, a sign of how Catullus cannot succeed at expressing his own situation with satisfactory fullness.

At issue, then, is Catullus's agency. In particular, his capacity to act as a poet is limited in the context of the absolute, natural silence of death. In the concrete terms of c. 65's concluding simile, something in the situation is like that of the maiden who, surprised by her mother, unintentionally discloses the gift, an apple, she has received from her beloved. On its surface, this vignette contrasts memory to forgetfulness, desire to its fulfillment or prolongation, and spontaneous action to compulsion. As readers have noted, however, as a comparison the simile is complicated. It is hard to decide what precisely in Catullus's situation is likened to which elements in the vignette, although the apple has seemed particularly beguiling. That the comparison is negative complicates matters further. Hortalus is enjoined to think that his request for poetry has *not* slipped Catullus's mind like the apple "slipped" from the young woman's lap.⁶ But I am persuaded by Skinner's suggestion that

what is most at stake here is agency: Catullus and the young woman are likened to each other in terms of how their obligations to familial duty have changed in ways both undesirable and irrevocable.⁷ For Catullus, this may be taken as representing a silencing of his poetic voice as that voice had been urban, separated from his family, and “personal” in a way that went far beyond familial responsibilities. To run the comparison in reverse, just as Catullus has lost his capacities (he cannot answer requests for original poetry, in light of the fact, or as recognition of the fact, that his entire household is ruined), so too must the young woman be imagined as grievously importuned insofar as she is a member of another person’s household. She belongs to her parent’s or parents’ household, and the problem is that the possibility of her transition to another household, normal now that she is come of age, is threatened.

AN APPLE REVEALED AND A STORY DISCLOSED

All of this is revealed obliquely by the language of the simile, as if it were a story that had been kept quiet. Unusually, Catullus seems to see no humor in the situation. For the young woman to be called “pitiable,” *miseræ*, and for her expression to be called “gloomy,” even “heart-stricken,” *tristi*, would seem to go far beyond what the appearance of an apple would warrant. If we assume that the descriptions are not inappropriate, then what the apple betokens must be serious, indeed, and its sudden revelation consequential. This reading would seem to be strengthened in turn by the superabundance of descriptions for the apple’s startling motion. Having “been sent” (*missum*) and then “placed” (*locatum*), it “runs forth” (*procurrit*); it “is shaken out” (*excutitur*); it “is driven headlong, falling in a rush” or “stream” or “torrent” (*prono praeceps agitur decursu*). The last Latin word suggesting motion, *decursu*, recalls the first, *procurrit*. It also anticipates what we may not be surprised, after c. 68(a), to see is water imagery (in *manat*, “flows”): the motion is fluid, if not liquid as such, putting the falling apple in parallel to the young woman’s “flowing” blush. These few lines thus convey a very vivid sense of motion, one quite surprising and swift. This seems emphasized by the speed of the verbs involved and by contrast with how the poem contains so few other moving parts, including characters.

There must be more here than a simile elaborated for its own sake. All at once, everything is revealed, in a manner we have seen in several poems: although the facts are not explicit, they are nonetheless spoken clearly aloud by the poet. But by the same token all is evidently lost. The accumulating motions effectively show that there is motion here despite

the young woman's best efforts at suppressing it: the motion is against her will. There is then a kind of spontaneity to the action (the apple is *praeceps*, falling "headlong" in a way that suggests lack of control) that goes beyond will or individual agency. With Catullus's own agency at issue, we could say that it seems to the poet not paradoxical but unacceptable that an individual be held responsible for such an event. Given the young woman's gender, and her discovery by her mother—the space is enclosed but pointedly not private (enough)—what is at issue must bear on her relationship to family, whether her father's or the family to come.

From the speaking subject's perspective, then, the issue is that a personal event is here not purely personal but public or, more precisely, familial. I would say that the "apple," *malum*, might symbolize an unwanted pregnancy: a "fruit" revealed once the young woman stands as her mother comes—as we may imagine the scene—storming in, suspecting what has happened and wanting only concrete proof. Whether or not we may be so specific, still we may say more generally that the young woman is clearly caught in an act that she imagines will not meet with her mother's approval or, by extension, her family's. Thus her blush is "guilty," *consciis*, and we may imagine it recalling the apple in color.⁸ In the confines of ancient Mediterranean society, it would be bad enough were she publicly known to be no longer a virgin; and such a change in status would be likely to be known in the world represented by Catullus's poetics of silence. On this reading, the man called her "betrothed," *sponsi*, would be in reality only an illicit lover. As a result, the woman's description as a "chaste maiden" (the apple falls from "the maiden's chaste lap"; v. 20: *casto uirginis e gremio*) is likewise unhappily ironic.

We may read that description as an extension of sympathy by Catullus to the young woman's situation. From this perspective, he describes her as she would wish, still, to be known, and describes her lover, too, as she would think of him. In the young woman's mind, she and her lover *feel* as intensely connected as erotic poetry would have all betrothal. The difference between the linguistic traditions of poetry and lived experience in public means, of course, that it cannot be.⁹ In this context the young woman's motion, like Catullus's offering of a poem in translation, is not properly an action in the sense of expressing true agency but only a reaction to a situation that is beyond her individual control.

CATULLUS'S RECUSAL AND THE LIMITS OF POETIC AGENCY

Via the back-and-forth metaphoricity of the simile, the young woman's positions—explicit and implicit; former, actual, and ideal—suggest a

great deal about Catullus's feelings regarding poetic creation as it is or, in the context of absolute, natural silence, is not a kind of agency. C. 65 would seem to be like other examples of Catullus's poetry, a willful exercise of his art of seeming to be overheard. But the poet's main action here, if there is one, is negative: possessed as he is by grief, he renders irony unhappy. His recusal from original composition may even be taken to symbolize irony's impossibility, as a life event has caused irony to shade into mere coincidence and accident. Thus both the apple—really: the young woman's life of love—and Catullus's brother, likewise a deep love, slip away with surprising quickness, leaving their former possessors bereft. Displaced from the active pursuit of individual desire, those possessors are re-placed in more passive roles. In that position it is difficult indeed to imagine what meaning or effect a personal utterance might have.

As the young woman's vignette shows in miniature, no matter how much we may wish it *not* so, the world of duty *is* otherwise. In particular here this concerns obligations to family as the site of most basic human activities. Pointedly, the poem frames the poet's own refusal as an "inability of his mind to bring forth the sweet offspring of the Muses" (vv. 3–4: *nec potis est dulcis Musarum expromere fetus / mens animi*). In thus linking poetic creation to sexual reproduction, with the poet implicitly playing a woman's role, Catullus seems to consider whether and how poetic creation relates to traditional images of agency as comprising more-masculine action.¹⁰ Since the thing created is, in these instances, unwanted, there is also a reevaluation of poetry's capacity to compel recollection. It matters that the young woman is "forgetful" or "unmindful," as a result of which her sort-of "poem," the falling apple, is as it were "composed" more swiftly than she can manage, against her wish.¹¹ The epithet *immemor* links her to Theseus in c. 64: he is also "unmindful" (v. 135) and thus productive of a family story despite himself.¹² In this connection, it may be telling that in both cc. 65 and 64 the story's unwanted arrival is signaled by a change in color. In c. 65, there is the sudden appearance of the implicitly red apple from the cloth of the young woman's dress; in c. 64 (vv. 202–50), there is Theseus's failure to substitute for his ship's black sail, which is understood to mean his failure to defeat the Minotaur and therefore his own death, the white sail that would signify his success and survival.

With Theseus's forgetfulness as a parallel, the young woman's forgetfulness stands to cause a profound change in her family structure; both stories would seem to involve violations of the proper order. It is of course also meaningful that Theseus has left behind Ariadne, who calls

him “forgetful”: Theseus fulfills the curse she throws in his direction, that “with the sort of mind [i.e., unmindfulness] with which he left [her] alone, with that same mind he bring death on himself and his family.”¹³ Theseus’s and the young woman’s stories are therefore linked in that both are “told” despite their author’s intentions, regardless of whether those intentions are for the better or the worse. The similarity may suggest that any intentions disregarding one’s role in a family structure are inevitably for the worse. Is Catullus therefore meant to be understood as feeling ashamed now at having previously shirked his responsibilities to family and having wasted the opportunity to interact meaningfully with his brother while he was still alive?

THE YOUNG WOMAN’S BLUSH AND OTHER UNWILLED SIGNS

However the poet’s emotion is understood, the young woman in c. 65 serves as a vivid example of the inefficacy of alleged agency, will, or desire. We may now compare the woman and her analogue Catullus more closely. Like her, Catullus is figured as merely reacting, in such a way that individual desire is subordinated to the true agencies constituted by larger, more powerful forces. She moves after her mother does, he responds to Hortalus’s request, and at the same time there is the equally unconscious blush. There is the discomfiting fact that the “lover”—whether the “betrothed” for the young woman or, for Catullus, Callimachus himself or his poetry more abstractly—cannot help the “beloved” at this moment of crisis, which is larger than the individual, involving him or her deeply in the family. We may read this as an indication of how disconsolate Catullus is now not only at his brother’s death but also, in a way more damagingly, at how his own poetry cannot be made to offer even coldest comfort.¹⁴ To continue the comparison, the young woman “jumps up” (*prosilit*), and Catullus is spurred into ineffectual action; her mother “has arrived” (*aduentu matris*), and the poem’s ostensible addressee Hortalus is recalled in a sort of artificial interruption of Catullus’s more natural, more sincerely emotional apostrophe to his brother.

Finally, and very evocatively, the blush “flows” (*manat*). As readers have noted, the flowing blush may be read as evoking the “flow” of Catullus’s tears over the gifts that c. 101 has him bearing to his brother according to tradition. In c. 101, the flow of tears helps to indicate the depth of Catullus’s emotion, including his frustration at how traditional funerary practice seems unsuited to personal expression. His wet tears are eloquent in contrast to his brother’s “mute ashes,” which are of

course dry, as well as the gifts, which evidently do not suffice to make his personal or emotional experience known. Like the young woman, Catullus is at that moment not placed in any of his wonted relations, whether to brother or to (erotic) poetry, but displaced into a more limited role as family member whose duty is dispiritingly clear.

For both the young woman and Catullus, then, the situation is one in which family obligation reduces or even eliminates personal choice. As a result, personal expression itself is obligated and unwilling, consisting in accidental revelation or in the impersonal formalities of public obligation. The form of the expression may be beautiful: we note again the development of fluid motion and liquid imagery from “in a rush,” *de-cursu*, to “flows,” *manat*, working in a way backward to inform “it runs forth,” *procurrit*; and all of that seems to pick up on Catullus’s appropriation, in c. 68(a), of Mallius’s shipwreck language. But such verbal beauty only makes the experience more harrowing to the individual, as the language seems to act without regard for him or her. The possibility for beauty in language here comes at a cost that the individual must pay, or perhaps more precisely cannot choose not to pay: it is precisely an “obligatory gift,” a *munus*, the equivalent of the traditional two coins for the ferryman. Insofar as right use of language is, again, the very definition of human being, this obligation to speak in certain, traditional ways represents indeed a reduction of the individual’s agency.

For Catullus in particular, what previously had been a great expression of his agency, namely, expression as such in the form of poetry, has shown itself—feels—incapable in the face of the absolute silence of death. Death insists that there is ultimately no story to tell and therefore no need for a poet’s efforts to excavate what lies beneath silence. Even the most brilliant poet cannot change the facts, but he may yet hold himself responsible. In poems like cc. 68(a) and 65, then, we may listen for a deeply emotional sort of attention to detail. In contrast to poems like c. 6, here there is an emphatic absence of vivid sense-perceptual descriptions. In c. 65’s captivating concluding simile, no tastes, textures, smells, or colors are described; they are only implied. In the same way, the poem’s first evocation of Catullus’s brother is small, almost unspeakably pathetic: “a flowing wave has lapped at his small, pale foot” (vv. 5–6: *fratris / pallidulum manans alluit unda pedem*). As we have seen in many poems, Catullus is self-consciously good at selecting and presenting such small details to achieve great poetic effects.¹⁵ In the death poems, his delicate ear might be read as suggesting a reticence born of the feeling that poetry is letting the poet down, as utterance must

eventually disappoint all language users. What we have seen Janan call “fetishistic concentration” has a cost, in that such a metonymic substitution means that the true object of desire is absent. This could go without saying, but that does not lessen Catullus’s—the language user’s—deep feelings of loss and disorientation.

Worse than that, the witty poet must also feel that he should be able, or should have been able, to say something efficacious. Instead he is left uncertain as to whether what he says is even meaningful at all, much less effectual. This is the dark flipside of Catullus’s investment in a poetics of silence. The poet who has invested so heavily in telling stories that are otherwise kept quiet must recognize that utterance not only comes out of but also tends, in the end, to silence.¹⁶ It is to Catullus’s perhaps most powerful evocation of that ineluctable fact that we now turn, in the form of c. 101.

The Silence of Death in C. 101

C. 101 offers Catullus’s most explicit thematization of the silence of death, focusing on the impossibility of true communication with the dead.¹⁷ The speaker addresses a dead interlocutor, his brother, and finds of course that the interlocutor cannot speak back. In this way c. 101 contains one of the most truly natural silences in Catullus’s poetry, a silence that is unamenable to enculturation and intractable in poetry. As a result, cultural practices purporting to diminish that silence are in fact themselves disappointing. This feeling redounds on the speaker’s experience of his own being-in-language. He is bereft and adrift (here in a way literally as well as figuratively) in a world that lacks meaningful conversation. How then might he continue to believe that poetry, which in his poetics of silence is the height of turn taking in language, is really the “sweet offspring of the Muses,” and thus able to keep its subjects vividly present after death?

Like all silences represented in the collection, however, even this most natural silence is not simple. The silence of death is natural in part because of how it has been classified as such, as being unamenable to enculturation, precisely by cultural practices. As these include, perhaps above all, poetry, the poet himself forms part of a tradition that has proven not only ineffectual in putting off the natural silence of death but also in a way responsible for its continued presence and importance. From the perspective of a poetics of silence, a poetic genre like

the funerary epigram, alongside a cultural practice of funerary ritual, is at risk of simply reinscribing the silence of death in every utterance leveled against it. Also at risk, then, in poetic responses to that absolute, natural silence is the significance or meaning of the individual and his or her feelings. Tradition thus exerts a sort of leveling power, as it were smoothing down the rough spots and peaks of emotion and personal expression. As such, traditional forms of expression represent a threat to the poet's agency, his orientation in language, and ultimately his being-in-language.

Here is how Catullus expresses it, with poignant clarity and brevity:

Transported through many peoples and through many seas,
 I come to these miserable rites, my brother,
 so that I may gift you in the final duty of death
 and address the mute ash in vain,
 since fortune has stolen you, you, from me, 5
 alas my miserable brother, taken unworthily from me.

Now, nonetheless, in the meantime: these, which in the ancient
 manner of our ancestors are handed over in gloomy duty during
 the rites,
 accept these things much flowing with brotherly weeping,
 and forever, my brother, hail and goodbye. 10

Multas per gentes et multa per aequora uectus,
 aduenio has miseras, frater, ad inferias,
 ut te postremo donarem munere mortis
 et mutam nequiquam alloquerer cinerem,
 quandoquidem fortuna mihi tete abstulit ipsum, 5
 heu miser indigne frater adempte mihi.
 nunc tamen interea haec, prisco quae more parentum
 tradita sunt tristi munere ad inferias,
 accipe fraterno multum manantia fletu,
 atque in perpetuum, frater, aue atque uale. 10

The space between potential and actual is filled here, as in other poems, with many things, but here it is filled especially with silence. In the first line, Catullus moves almost breathlessly quickly but not easily; our attention is drawn to difficulty and burden in the form of the obligation comprised by certain signs. His movement is both "through" (with reference to his actual motion in historical time) and "over" (with reference to the speaking subject as he entered into poetic time) the sort of space that is dwelt on at much greater length by epic. I would say that epic is evoked here specifically in its function of recording what happens after

something else has already happened, usually something consequential and awful. As readers have noted, the first line of c. 101 recalls Homer's image of Odysseus's travels.¹⁸ On the one hand, then, Catullus is implicitly likened to Odysseus, the epic paragon of homecoming, which, however, always includes the recognition that home and homecomer have been irrevocably changed.¹⁹ We are thus not surprised when c. 101 deals with changes of a similar sort, indeed in a similar way, by emphasizing a sort of silence: homecoming or return to family involves a distressing difficulty in communication as home and homecomer may be, at best, only awkwardly reconciled. All of what follows in c. 101 is under the sign of voyage or passage. This, too, is a sign of difficulty: we modern travelers must work to remember that travel in antiquity was as a rule beset with difficulty, indeed, even danger to the traveler's life.²⁰ Under such conditions, a journey is not straightforward. As a result, and still in the context of the Odyssean intertext, c. 101's opening line evokes a wide range of difficulties both physical and emotional.

AENEAS, "TACITURNITY," AND THE OBLIGATORY GIFT
OF SPEECH

On the other hand, and in close connection, we may read Catullus in c. 101 in terms of the Aeneas whom his own poetry, including these lines, helped to inspire. Like Virgil's epic protagonist, Catullus is "transported through many peoples and through many seas." Although, as it happens, his transport is *to* the Troad, he nevertheless provides a model for how Aeneas's earlier journey may be entered into literature. Aeneas was "first to come *from* the shores of Troy" having been "much tossed about on land and on the deep" (*Aen.* 1.1–3: *Troiae qui primus ab oris / . . . uenit . . . / multum ille et terris iactatus et alto*). His experience is of course also larger, or rather he is subject to more, having "endured much also in war" (1.5: *multa quoque et bello passus*). For our purposes, however, perhaps most important is that this Aeneas is famously reluctant to speak about his experience: for example, when prompted by Dido for his story, he responds that to tell it is "unspeakable sorrow" (2.3: *infandum, regina, iubes renouare dolorem*); and when he has finished, he returns to silence as if to a sort of ground state (3.718: *conticuit tandem*).²¹ In this sense Catullus's speaking subject in c. 101 combines characteristics of Odysseus, namely, an incapacity properly to return "home" (both home and homecomer having been changed), and of Aeneas, namely, an incapacity or unwillingness to give voice to his lived experiences and emotions.

C. 101 seems to have been understood already in antiquity as vividly exemplifying a poetics of silence in this way. A look here at how Catullus serves as inspiration and intertext for Virgil's composition of his reticent hero helps to put Catullus's own "epic" sort of silence into perspective. From this perspective, we may see more clearly how c. 101 figures silence as a natural but distressingly depersonalizing consequence of personal and cultural investments in utterance including conversation.

The first line of c. 101, evocative of Homer and inspirational to Virgil, is adapted directly at *Aen.* 6.692–3. The adaptation is so direct that I am tempted to call Aeneas, in this context, a "Catullus figure"—at the least, the one sheds light on the other. There Aeneas is greeted on his journey through the underworld by his dead father, Anchises. Anchises exclaims, "Through what lands and through what seas do I receive you, by what dangers tossed, my son!" (*quas ego te terras et quanta per aequora uectum / accipio! quantis iactatum, nate, periclis*). Virgil's lines adapt not only Catullus's opening phrase in c. 101 but also, in a striking addition and change, Catullus's command, later in the same poem, to his brother to "accept [these things] much flowing with brotherly weeping" (v. 9: *accipe fraterno multum manantia fletu*).

We may make the contrast explicit. Aeneas, who like Catullus has been "transported," is met by his deceased father; unlike Catullus's unresponsive brother, Anchises receives his visitor without being asked and, crucially, speaks first, before being addressed and evidently without needing to be. Virgil's deviations from his Catullan model are therefore precisely along the axis of speech and silence. As a result, we may imagine c. 101 as being thought of already in antiquity as revolving around that axis.²² This interest in silence is suggested further by how Anchises expresses his delighted amazement at Aeneas's arrival: "Is it really given me to look, my son, on your face and to hear a voice familiar to me and to respond with my voice familiar to you?" (*Aen.* 6.698–9: *datur ora tueri / nate, tua et notas audire et reddere uoces*).²³ Anchises, we are given to understand, has been hoping to see Aeneas, to see the part of him that speaks, and to hear him speak: the Latin word conventionally understood to mean "face" here, *ora*, literally means "mouths." Delighted recognition is therefore made to depend on and to imply the faculty of speech. Anchises thus greets his son above all as a potential participant in "conversation." For father and son, this is a moment of sweetly broken silence.

The contrast to Catullus's experience in c. 101 is sharp. Catullus has journeyed, in a way, to the edge of the world, but he cannot enter the

underworld or otherwise take part in conversation with his brother. His speech is met only by silence. As a result, any receipt of his gifts or of his person must be at his command. But we have seen already, in c. 65, how Catullus's agency is felt to be limited in the context of the absolute, natural silence of death. In that context, any command to the dead is naturally ineffectual and cannot but represent a travesty of the ordinary powers of speech.²⁴ Between Aeneas's and Catullus's situations, there is thus a difference in agency generally and of capacity for speech in particular. Aeneas is warmly received, having been long desired, and spoken to as such. By contrast, Catullus is not received as such, is himself the only source of emotion, including desire, or other experience at the moment of the poem, and likewise must be the one to speak if there is to be speech at all. For the survivor, it seems, in a context of continuously commemorative poetry and funerary ritual, the act of speech is not an individual choice, an expression of his person, but an undesirable and unrewarding obligation, indeed again an "obligatory gift" (*munus*).

CATULLUS'S ONE-SIDED CONVERSATION AT TROY

The contrast to Aeneas's conversation with his father serves to emphasize how Catullus's "epic" journey in c. 101 is a matter of his own solitary speech being met by silence. From this perspective, c. 101 may be read as awkwardly reversing the usual situation of epitaphs, many of which were written in elegiac couplet.²⁵ Instead of a depersonalized epitaph to be read by any passing reader, c. 101 figures the speaker's emotional disturbance at having an intensely personal connection to the dead as well as an obligation that *should* therefore be meaningful. We might say that, in contrast to the stereotypical wish that the earth rest lightly on the dead, the fact of the ash here rests heavily on the speaker. The poem itself serves as a fitting epitaph, and indeed in this function it has inspired many others. But we might say that, as far as c. 101's original and perpetual speaker is concerned—he composed, and something of his voice overrides any later reader's, including our own—the poem recalls the wrong person, drawing attention to the survivor and his voice instead of to the deceased, who is silent.

In this sense, all recollection, all poetic commemoration in the personal voice of the speaker, is misplaced. This cannot but emphasize what we have seen is Catullus's feeling of displacement and his sense of how distance, absence, and silence interact. As Catullus says explicitly, his speech—including this poem—is therefore in vain.²⁶ In stark contrast indeed, then, to the situation allowed for Aeneas—a *katabasis*

among the talkative dead, possible only in the fictional world of epic—Catullus's experience of silence as it exists in fact is the more disappointing and passive.²⁷ In c. 101, he is active (grammatically, thematically) to no positive effect, speaks and may exclaim only in traditional, ritual forms that may impose a sort of silence on personal expression (as we will see with reference to *conclamatio*), and is met with only silence in return. In other words, all his attempts at signification—as depicted by the poem, and in the form of the poem itself—seem to center around an inevitable meaninglessness. In the absence of any real possibility of a response, Catullus's utterance must be emptied of meaning.

This particular, personal experience of the general fact of silence makes for profound emotion when Catullus says explicitly that he “addresses [his brother's] mute ash in vain” (v. 4: *et mutam nequiquam alloquerer cinerem*). If, from the perspective of a poetics of silence, silence surrounds all poems, in this case the silences that precede and follow utterance are felt to be disturbingly identical. Those silences are reflections of each other that miss the fact of mirror image, lacking the inversions that serve to distinguish the real object from the illusory image. It seems, then, that at this moment after his brother's death, Catullus feels that one sort of silence is now awfully the same as any other. In particular we might say that all sociocultural silences must somehow suggest the natural silence to come. What once might have been a congenial sociocultural silence, a pause in a conversation, is now a sign of distressingly permanent absence of speech. All the fantastic claims of earlier poetry notwithstanding, there is a fact: Catullus's brother speaks neither to initiate conversation nor to continue it, because—of course—he cannot.

This ineluctable fact registers more powerfully on Catullus in emotional terms if we accept Biondi's argument not only that Catullus's “ordinary experience” is too conditioned by “centuries of speculation and human shrewdness” to believe in the myth he intentionally recalls, but also that, “unlike his great contemporaries Cicero and Lucretius,” Catullus “does not attempt to exorcise the anguishing reality of death by philosophical means.”²⁸ As such things as ordinary speech and the consolation of philosophy fail, there remains the possibility for seemingly meaningful signs in poetry. As the poet has turned his attention inward, then, paradoxically he is compelled to describe mostly what there is without. The effect is one of signs and details increasing in emotional power as they decrease in meaning. As such details insist on, or even impose, “fetishistic concentration,” they render the poet's acts of speech *merely* palliative or metonymic, with all the dissatisfying

consequences we have seen. In the context of death's absolute, natural silence, acts of speech, including poems, are unmeaningful in themselves insofar as they can never elicit their speakers' desired response from wanted interlocutors, now deceased.

TEARS AND THE OCEAN; OR, VOYAGE AS DISORIENTATION

Viewed in the context of a poetics of silence, c. 101's most vivid image is also, awfully, its most meaningless. The tears with which the unwilling, strictly unwanted gifts are wetted form a pointed contrast to the desired conversation that, of course, cannot occur in its properly wavelike motion of call and response. As the poet finds his utterance met by silence, the broader "language"—visual, gestural, and performative as well as verbal—of funerary ritual, a "language" that is public, masculine, and decorous, does not seem truly to accommodate his feelings. Unexpressed are their private depths and how they range over variously gendered modes of being. Particular questions of agency and femininity are discussed further in chapter 6.

In the meantime, in connection with the contrast between flowing, eloquent tears and stilled, silent ash, we may note that the occasion of the poem has Catullus standing still in the midst of movements across and in water. His brother's movement has of course come to an unexpected end here at Troy. Catullus's own movement is set to continue with the unwanted added burden of that absence: he is his family's emissary to the grave site and likely will return to Verona. At the imagined moment of the poem, both Catullus and his brother are liminal figures, placed at thresholds between one part of life and the next.

As in c. 68(a), then, so here we might infer a connection between the saltwater of tears and that of the ocean, and likewise a sense of how that connection makes of tears something excessively general. The experience is, if I may, too "oceanic" for any detailed signs truly to express the individual's feelings.²⁹ Certainly the experience of sea voyage, or perhaps more broadly the sense of contact with the sea, is striking for the avowedly urban poet, in whose poetry there is ocean only rarely (e.g., c. 4, but even there it is a thing of the past). For the feeling that an individual's tears, evidently a symbol of deep personal feeling, are overwhelmed by contrast with the ocean, we may compare 63.46–49.³⁰ There Attis, with "liquid mind" (*liquidante mente*) and "turbulent spirit" (*animo aestuante*) "looks out at the empty sea with tears in her eyes and, gloomy, addresses her homeland miserably aloud" (vv. 48–49: *ibi ma-*

ria uasta uisens lacrimantibus oculis / patriam allocuta maesta est ita uoce miseriter).

Much of the language here is parallel to Catullus's description of the young woman in the simile concluding c. 65 (discussed earlier). Since, as we have seen, that young woman parallels the poet, so may Attis be taken as applying as well to Catullus's situation. This reading is strengthened by the strong verbal and thematic parallel to c. 101 in c. 63's opening: Attis has "*been transported over the deep seas on a swift ship*" (v. 1: *super alta uectus Attis celeri rate maria*). We may say, then, that Catullus regrets the fact of his sea voyage in a way like Attis: if not because of any choice of his own behind it, then indeed because of how it figures his agency as having been undone. Like Attis, Catullus is displaced and disoriented in a way that seems to leave him without succor. Both are newly feminized figures who, as such, receive little or no meaningful assistance from traditional, masculine cultural practices and discourses, including poetry.³¹

On the other hand, it seems that Catullus yet feels some sense of responsibility, despite his powerlessness, and so of personal failure. It was after all his decision to develop his poetic faculty that kept him at Rome, away from what might have been a potentially more meaningful relationship with his brother. And it is, as we have seen, that same developed sense of irony that now causes his performance of his family's funerary ritual to feel dissatisfying when it ought to be reintegrating and cathartic. In this context, Catullus's tears in c. 101 are reckoned as appropriate to the task but, like the gift which they wet or stain, inadequate to the situation; of course they cannot wash away what has happened. Catullus's flowing tears operate like a shadow: they are cast by his body, illuminated as the body is by the voyage or by the light cast by his brother's death, onto the surface of the offerings. They serve to figure the transitory relationship, adding their natural saltiness or figurative bitterness to their function as an index of Catullus's body, signifying him as their source, as well as his brother's body-become-ash.

The tears thus signify both brothers contiguously, but as a result and by contrast they emphasize how much has been changed. Catullus lives and so may shed expressive tears, which are wet, in contrast to the dry, literally insignificant ash that remains of his brother.³² With the moment's passing, moreover, the location must change, such that additional tears will signify only the grief and the bereaved, no longer the object of his bereavement. In this way, again, only the "wrong" person,

the survivor, is signified. Catullus's tears draw attention to his solitude and isolation as a speaker.

C. 101'S TIME SCHEME AND THE POET'S TEMPORARY BEING-
IN-LANGUAGE

Catullus's tears and the ocean into which they are subsumed also work together to concretize c. 101's complex time scheme.³³ First, as we have seen, Catullus may be likened to but also contrasted to Odysseus and Aeneas, as what we may call personal times and mythological or epic times intersect with appalling consequences. The resultant feeling of the individual being, at the mercy of larger, impersonal forces, is strengthened by the comparison to Attis, whose own ill-advised attempt to dedicate himself to mythological or divine time is swiftly felt to be a disastrous undoing of his individual being. Second, as readings of other poems have suggested, the speaking subject is identified with but displaced in time from the composing poet. The poem's perpetual present tense is only asymptotic toward a truly present identity. As a result, if Catullus repeats the poem later, he is most likely no longer at Troy, and the "I" who breaks the otherwise total silence in the poem is no longer the "he" who reads. Third, the same subject is likewise near but always already about to be farther from the true object of his affections, his brother. In this connection, too, the present tense is only technically simultaneous with the utterance of the poem as the poet is present before his brother; by contrast, real contiguity of time and experience is overpowered by the sempiternity of death, which has a starting point in human time but has no meaningful end.

All of this results in a powerful tension of time, in which the relationship between utterance, always time limited, and silence, which serves to structure time, may be characterized more precisely.³⁴ In contrast to lived experience but in a way that resonates with how experience is recalled in poetry, the poem's reader-aloud is simultaneously *both* here and now, at the present moment of the poem's recitation, *and* there and then, when the poem's occasion was experienced for the first time. How much time do we readers allow at the poem's end, after its end, to capture the after-silence of this poem, into which the historical Catullus seems to have fallen? Is this the last poem he could have written?³⁵ However these questions are answered, we have seen that Catullus puts both of these facts—his unwanted "epic" status, his silent but eloquent experience of passing time—powerfully, if not quite plainly, in the opening line and in the image of his tears. In addition to evoking and

rewriting epic journeys, the opening lines (vv. 1–4) include what readers have noticed is a slight grammatical problem. I discuss it at some length here because of how it specifies the poem's approach to silence and speech as occurring in time and as relating being-in-language quite closely to mortality.

According to the "rules" of classical Latin grammar, the two subordinate clauses describing Catullus's purpose ("to gift you in the final duty of death"; *postremo donarem munere mortis*; v. 3; and "to address your mute ash in vain"; *mutam nequiquam alloquerer cinerem*; v. 4) ought to see their verbs take a certain form because of the main clause describing his travel and arrival ("I come to these miserable rites, my brother"; *aduenio has miseras, frater, ad inferias*; v. 2). Since the main verb is present-tense indicative, "I come to" (*aduenio*), the subordinate verbs ought to be present or perfect subjunctive. Instead, they are imperfect subjunctive ("to give," *donarem*; "to speak to," *alloquerer*), as if following a main clause with past-tense indicative. A nice formulation by Biondi helps to make clearer how this seemingly technical linguistic situation makes a great difference in meaning: "*donarem* and *alloquerer* . . . depending syntactically and logically on the present *aduenio* but psychologically on *uectus*, felicitously both breach the sequence of tenses and once again frustrate our expectation."³⁶

I would emphasize that any expectation thus frustrated belongs not only to the reader but also to the speaking subject. As Biondi observes, "After the very long journey we should expect something to happen to make up for the associated toils and tribulations."³⁷ How much more freighted must the experience be for the traveler himself! As Biondi goes on to note, the poem develops that feeling of frustration in what we have noted already is a reworking of epic, capturing what he refers to as a "disproportion" or an image of unbridgeable distance "in a highly elliptical orbit whose apogees, very far apart, are represented by the indeterminate time before the *inferiae* and the infinite time (*atque in perpetuum*) after them."³⁸ The "problem" in the poem's syntax thus symbolizes a real problem in the poet's experience: "The poet is physically present for the *inferiae* (*aduenio has*), but their constituent acts, the *munus mortis* and the *nouissima uerba*, reveal themselves as so disproportionately small, so inadequate and impotent in the face of death, that the ritual shrinks from a present gesture to a past intention."³⁹

As we are seeing, in certain poems Catullus figures the impossibility of human utterance to make any meaning in the context of the absolute, natural silence of death. That this unbearable situation can be recorded

in language as a violation of grammar is a sign not only of Catullus's excellence as a poet. Ironically, it also signifies how even a refined understanding and practice of poetic composition is, in the final analysis, ineffectual or unmeaningful. The broken grammatical rule symbolizes Catullus's heartbreak. The cause is his brother's death, to be sure, but through it also the broken promise of poetry in particular and language or utterance more generally. At this point Catullus represents a certain aspect of this problem clearly: language or utterance is indeed time limited, causing our being-in-language to reflect our being-in-time, while silence would seem to stretch on without end in a way that suggests a paradoxical "immortality of death," in which death exists in time but is not time limited.

The mismatch in time between traditional, highly encultured action like language use and the natural fact of death, what Biondi rightly calls a "disproportion," may be put in somewhat different terms. These do not depend—as does Biondi's argument—on specific punctuation of sections within c. 101 or on a timing of the poem's depicted action and emotions relative to those of cc. 65 and 68(a or b). Instead these terms depend more generally on the impossibility of communication with the dead. At the moment when that impossibility is discovered or first felt deeply, especially by a poet who is confident in his capacity for expression, there must be raised the question of whether meaningful communication is possible at all. Traditional sorts of poetry of course depend on the possibility. It seems that Catullus's poetics of silence in places accommodates, and in the death poems may require, a negative answer.

EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE ON THE SHORE

Important in this connection is what c. 101's "incorrect" imperfect subjunctives ("to give," *donarem*; "to speak to," *alloquerer*) connote. Especially in contrast with main-clause present indicatives, suggesting denotation of fact, imperfect subjunctives connote a potential in the present that goes unrealized. The grammatical fact that those actions are unrealized in present time is significant for a poem that speaks perpetually in the present tense. Since the poem never depicts a future, the actions described by those imperfect subjunctives are, from the poem's perspective, always unrealized, only ever potentially true. Likewise, but from the opposite perspective, their potential truth is awful. From the point of view of the speaking subject's present, the potential is there, or should be there. But in this poem Catullus is continuously discovering that the potential may not come true, for a reason that is forbid-

dingly natural and so felt to be unamenable to treatment in cultural products, whether they be traditional ritual or innovative poems. Death is figured as opposed to culture and, in so many words, unable to be addressed to the satisfaction of the addressor. The ultimate silence cannot be matched, or infused with meaning, by any utterance.

A small detail in the Latin, then, provides an extraordinary emotional hinge for the first part of the poem. Catullus, the speaking subject, cannot stop composing as he had trained himself to, despite his feeling—in the other death poems, in certain other poems discussed earlier—that poetry paradoxically insists that utterance ultimately lacks meaning. Having been transported with the purpose of giving a final gift to his brother, and with the hope perhaps of an emotionally satisfying moment of speech, the speaking subject discovers that he is distressingly the only subject able at all to be present. He is as it were left behind or abandoned in the poem's permanent present, which shows only the results of the past with which no direct contact is possible, and without the beloved turn taking that causes each new present moment, when strung together, to form the future: in the Latin, "last words" are ambiguously also "most recent words" (*nouissima uerba*).⁴⁰ Catullus could, and perhaps would want to, give to his brother's remains their traditional final gift. When he does so, however, it is grudgingly or with a feeling of their uselessness (vv. 6–9, discussed later). Likewise, he could, and certainly would want to, speak to his brother, but this precisely he cannot do, at least not—and this no small negation—in the ordinary expectation of a response. Literally only to speak to, and not to be spoken to in return, honors only the letter and not the spirit of that fundamental human action of conversation and interpersonal exchange.

That stingy negation occurs because the human, conventional law of conversation (in and as life) is overridden by the natural law of silence (in and as a preeminent sign of death). Catullus must have known that he was coming to speak to "mute ash" (*mutam . . . cinerem*). But part of the poem's emotional force consists in its contrasting the speaking subject's past-time rational knowledge of that fact of silence to his present-time emotional experience of it. The present experience is charged with greater emotion. If the silence is not quite a surprise, it yet depends for its full impact on how it is experienced at this moment in time. It is as if the speaking subject feels only now, at the moment of speaking, what he must have known, that hope for conversation is of course "in vain." In this connection, we may note that *nequiquam* ends in a vivid elision, as its final syllable elides with the first syllable of "address," *alloquerer*. As

a result, the caesura becomes a kind of awkward pause during which the poem points to the speaking subject's new emotional knowledge, and out of which he must emerge permanently changed. How may he hope to speak this situation aloud?

A LYRIC EXPERIENCE OF EPIC SILENCE

Given c. 101's perpetual present time, Catullus's emotional experience is itself always present, always new enough not to have become memory or to be commemorable in a complete or satisfying way. Not for nothing does c. 65 similarly represent Catullus's brother as always only "recently" (*nuper*) died, and Catullus as always only now feeling the effects as if for the first time. The brother's permanent absence, his permanent silence, is thus recognized and experienced as a fact always only now; again, we could call it *nouissimum*, "last" and "most recent." This moment at the Troad grave, or even the death more generally, is not presented as a memory, on which a more-tranquil Catullus could draw for poetic composition along Wordsworthian lines. Instead it is something like an unchangeable fact in the present that continually preoccupies the poet despite how he might wish for the poetry to move in a different direction. The speaker seems not to hope that this will change: the silence of a formerly potential and beloved interlocutor is expected to last forever (*in perpetuum*).⁴¹

That a poem may record this feeling is both an artistic achievement for the poet and, for the historical person, a sorely insufficient palliative. Indeed, in the context of a poetics of silence, the speaker's frustration in c. 101 is I would say Catullus's most vivid illustration of the problem of expression. What Skinner has called an "unbridgeable gap" is felt to separate language, including both ordinary conversation and poetry, from lived experience as it is marked by the absolute, natural silence that comes with death. As we have seen, for Catullus this means that the meaningfulness of his particular kind of poetry is called into question. What does it mean to make a pretense of spontaneous conversation when real conversation is no longer possible, even ultimately impossible? If meaning is even in part a function of individual expression, what may the poet make of the fact that a historical accident reveals him to be, like the young woman in the simile in c. 65, not free to exercise his agency but constrained by obligations, including paradoxically obligatory gifts? Catullus is made by his brother's death to question his poetic choices, his capacity as a language user, and therefore virtually his being-in-language.

More concretely, we may wonder what meaning or intention there may be in c. 101's opening reference to epic when even that allusive, literary "choice" would seem to be dictated by unchangeable circumstance. As poetry thus shades into historiography, what is the value of this "palinode of Homer's *Nekyia*" when the history could hardly have allowed any other sort of representation? The poet's activity is thus paradoxically both his own and not his own. There is here what Conte calls "emotion and enjoyment . . . foreseen and sought after by the poet himself in conscious artistry."⁴² As a result, "the reader's collaboration is indispensable to the poet if the active phase of allusion is to take effect. The allusion will occur as a literary act if a sympathetic vibration can be set up between the poet's and the reader's memories when these are directed to a source already stored in both."⁴³ Catullus desires the reader's sympathy in this complex way, combining ordinary emotional sympathy with the more specialized or learned literary "sympathetic vibration" that Conte sees as characterizing allusion. The effect—perhaps "success"—of the poem is therefore in part a result of its balance between those two modes, the one ordinary and personally emotional, the other literary and somewhat depersonalizing.

Biondi offers a helpful description of how these two modes "coexist": "With no force either joining or disjoining them, the stylistic levels support each other on the only line of tangible meeting: the referent, the content of the poem, which operates as their catalyst and represents the path of the intended poetic effect."⁴⁴ Biondi writes chemically, sensually, almost biologically, but at the last moment returns to Conte's tacit interest in authorial intention. As we have seen, in a poem like c. 101 the possibility of such "symbiosis" (194) between the poet's intention and the reader's reception is contingent, even constrained, by facts that may not be imagined otherwise or away. Biondi may therefore speak of "intended poetic effect" with an unwitting irony: the abstract phrase does not exclude the possibility or, as Catullus seems to experience it in the death poems, the certainty that "intention" comes from someplace other than the poet's mind or a person's memory. As all stand in for the same deeply underlying meaning, all seem to tend toward undifferentiated silence.

In other words, while there is, of course, a literal fiction to c. 101, any irony is so slight as to disappear. Likewise, any literary sophistication is almost an effect of the moment speaking itself so free from encumbrance that it hardly needs a speaker, much less the historical person of the composing poet. Ironically indeed for Catullus, specialist in poetry

purporting to be overheard, c. 101 perhaps more than any other poem reads as truly occasional, dictated by its moment. As the poem speaks of its own situation, it diminishes the poet's agency: he is put in motion toward silence, or perhaps rather recognizes that tendency as common to all beings-in-language. In a way, then, this death poem figures the death of the author insofar as the "author" is a figure comprised of literary irony, of purported mismatch between setting and speech act, or between stylistic registers, or of dissonance of sign and signified. C. 101 is an image of the poet, the living being, concluding that any difference between sign and signified, a regular source of witty or charming irony, is overmatched by the more consequential difference between a person's rational knowledge that there can be silence and his or her emotional experience of that fact firsthand.

C. 101 gains in power by representing not so much a silence in itself, as if from the outside, as the speaking subject's internal experience of silence. In other words, although formally it is an epigram, in focus and tone it is lyric. By thus focusing on the speaker's consciousness, it draws attention, again, to the "wrong" person. But at the liminal place of burial, the speaker approaches the silent dead both literally and figuratively.⁴⁵ As Catullus stands at his brother's grave, deep in the experience of silence that disturbs conversation, he is but one step away from his own permanent silence to come. In c. 101 he is always encountering that profoundest, most disturbing silence as if for the first time.

A cultural practice like poetry may capture this experience but only dissatisfyingly and with unintended consequences. As small details are burdened with ever-greater significance, the poet's attention to detail borders on a kind of "fetishistic concentration" indeed. Preoccupied as he is in c. 65 with his brother's "small, pale foot," or in c. 101 with the tear-stained gifts, Catullus as poet symbolically reenacts the displacement he feels as a person. In each case the detail is an unsatisfactory replacement. Insofar as poetry will endure, the poetic replacement and along with it the feeling of displacement are permanent. Thus would poetry seem to diminish the poet's agency by going against the person's will. The accidental setting of this poem being Troy, this represents either a travesty of epic or its very condition of possibility. For commemoration is possible only when there has been a loss and thus when there is an absence or a distance.

It may be, then, that epic is truly appropriate only for the *next* generation, after the generation that has witnessed a momentous event has passed away and into poetic memory. In this way, only the poet would

remain, and crucially he is not involved in what has happened. C. 101's power is thus increased by contrast. Marooned between epic and lyric, Catullus is able to speak neither his brother's death as epic nor its effect on his own "lyric consciousness," his own feeling, straightforwardly. Faced with the absolute, natural silence of his brother's death, Catullus finds only cold comfort in the cultural practice of poetry. His poem is powerful in part because of how it is thus marked by certain charged silences of his own.

C. 101 and Funerary Ritual

Examples could be multiplied showing how Latin epic after Catullus learns this complicated combination of genres, perspectives, utterance, and silence. To deepen our understanding of c. 101's complications, however, in this section I discuss the poem's participation in another kind of cultural practice, funerary ritual. This helps us to understand more deeply just how quieted the person's voice must be, in the context of a tradition that asserts its dominance at such a personally consequential moment as a loved one's death. I begin by considering Feldherr's argument for a reading of c. 101's social effects in the context of ancient Roman funerary ritual.⁴⁶

According to Feldherr, funerary ritual served both to distinguish living from dead and, then, to separate the mourners from living humankind more generally before eventually reintegrating them. As Feldherr puts it, the Roman funeral thus culminates in "the final distinction between the living and the dead that prepares for the mourner's reintegration into the world of society." From this perspective, c. 101 "moves from the isolation of the mourner, contaminated by death, to the final separation from the dead that returns the speaking poet to the world of the living, after passing through a moment of unrestricted mourning where the impact of the loss of the deceased on the living is most clearly revealed."⁴⁷ In particular in the first-person address, *alloquerer*, the poem "signals that Catullus has re-emerged as a speaker; he has recovered from the silence that, he claimed in 68A, his brother's death imposed on him."⁴⁸

I find this reading of *alloquerer* too affirming in light of what I argue is the speaker's continuous feeling of subordination to circumstance that is both properly unspeakable and, in a way perhaps worse for the poet, "spoken" or symbolized only in ritualistic terms that have little to

do with the person's emotions. Especially in its close conjunction with "in vain," *nequiquam*, in my view the first-person address of *alloquerer* suggests a stifling formality, the feeling that tradition and society overwhelm expression and the person. This would only be emphasized if, as Feldherr suggests, c. 101 circulated among the members of Catullus's social circle. I think that Feldherr is right to suggest that "the very existence of Catullus's poem as a text signifies Catullus's participation in the network of personal bonds from which he had claimed in poems 65 and 68A his grief excluded him." But in my view that formulation underemphasizes the way in which, and the extent to which, both Catullus's "participation" and the "network of personal bonds" are changed away from his wonted "modern" manner of living in elite Roman society. As we have seen, in parallel to the young woman in c. 65, Catullus is now beholden to more traditional obligations, with his preferred society replaced by remnants of family and perhaps by what passes for society in Verona.⁴⁹

I thus find active in c. 101 an aspect of Catullus's speaking to his brother's mute ashes "in vain" that is more continuously or permanently disturbing than Feldherr's reading of the positively reintegrative social function of Roman funerary ritual might suggest.⁵⁰ As a poem, c. 101 seems to offer little hope for any such experience in Catullus's future; indeed, as we have seen, it hardly imagines a future aside from how it is to be marked indelibly by the brother's continual absence. To be fair, Feldherr works to correct a critical undervaluation of the poem's positive effect in terms of the demonstrable function of funerary ritual: "the funerary rites to which these lines allude can provide a more positive model for how Catullus's poem communicates."⁵¹ Without wishing to revert to "treat[ing] the ritual largely as a foil for the more meaningful communication that is the poem itself," I do, however, wish to argue that Feldherr's positive reading of the effects of ritual, as it is understood to play out in future time, must be balanced by the negative emotions of the speaker as they are permanent in the poem's present tense.⁵²

As suggested earlier, a primary meaning of c. 101 concerns the inefficacy, perhaps even the impossibility, of meaning in cultural practices like poetry and, above all, funerary ritual. Feldherr's argument for the potential social function of the poem, positive in that the poem replaces a grievously distant monument for the deceased, must therefore be balanced by the poem's negative commemorative effect of "preserving a present [time, space] image of the dead."⁵³ For that preserved image, acting as a kind of "fetish" that reinscribes silence in place of desired

speech, makes clear that any reintegration is into a society that has been diminished and changed. As a result, the mourner's social role is permanently changed in response to that novel, final silence. Reference to the dead may be unproblematic to the extent that it shares in traditional commemoration that is fixed and accessible, however complex in practice. But the reference itself, as an utterance, is problematic indeed to the extent, and in the sense, that the dead cannot refer back: they are a zero sign, quite troublingly in that they were once active signifiers or significant beings. Having been nullified, they threaten to nullify others, turning attempts at utterance likewise toward silence. The silents, plural, thus referred to are also silenced, and this casts a pall on utterance.

With this in mind, Feldherr's correct attention to the potentially positive social function of c. 101 may deepen our understanding of the poem's illustration of the actually negative linguistic problem of expression, of finding a means for expression that is meaningful at all, much less lasting. Like traditional epic, funerary ritual would not seem to conduce to personal expression in a lyric mode. C. 101 thus raises the question of how to represent what is passing, including emotion or subjectivity not normally open to representation in traditional discourses: how to say aloud what can be said but traditionally may not be. This question is more complicated when, as here, what is thus passing is in reference to someone passed, someone who has gone from present to past only recently, within living memory. For inscription implies a permanence beyond even the author's voice, and so immediately shadows his own, natural mortality with its cultural immortality.

In c. 101, then, I believe we may hear the voice of the changed, scared singer of c. 65 vv. 12–14 singing always from the shadows (only such mythological shadows seemed deep and dark enough to represent his own dismal situation). From this perspective c. 101 is deeply ambivalent. As Feldherr puts it, the poem has a "dual status as a mimesis of a single utterance and as a stable and unchanging text": "while a recognition of the transience of the moment of parting *sub specie aeternitatis* may seem an unsurprising theme in such a context, it is important to note in how many ways the contrast between the irreversible flow of time and the present instant governs the poem's content."⁵⁴

We may link this discussion of Feldherr's argument to the earlier discussion of Catullus's figuration of himself as involved in epic against his will. In this connection, we may see more clearly how the relationship to time is inflected by an utterance so closely connected to silence. The silence that suffuses and surrounds c. 101 is profound.⁵⁵ As a poem

it represents, or is intended to be taken as representing, speech. And as a convincingly occasional poem, it purports a specific moment of speech, that is, an utterance in time and (of special interest here) space. But above all it emphasizes the inefficacy of this particular speech in the context of the surrounding silence. Since that silence is, as suggested earlier, of the most natural and inevitable kind, the inefficacy of this particular speech may be read as a token of the more general type. The particular failure of Catullus's utterance in c. 101 is that it does not bring about his intended effect in the world. One good verbal turn ought to inspire another, including a continued breathing of each other's exhaled breath, in a kind of exaltation of conversation. This points to how language is generally limited by the silence of death. The poem's attention to conventional or traditional activities in mourning emphasizes the unbridgeable gap between language, in our experience a matter of human limits, and the world, which always exceeds those limits. In other words, the failure of a cultural practice like funerary ritual to express personal emotion symbolizes the failure of utterance to make headway against silence. From this perspective, although c. 101 succeeds brilliantly as a poem (it is hard to find a critic who dislikes it, and many poems have been modeled on it), it thus serves to immortalize in culture the inefficacy of utterance in response to the unresponsive silence of death.⁵⁶

C. 96 and the Impossibility of Communicating with the Dead

In Catullus's poetics of silence, attempts to communicate with the dead result only in a deepened sense of how unmeaningful utterance is when ranged against the absolute, natural silence of death. The strict impossibility of such communication governs a final death poem, c. 96. A recent reading would suggest otherwise: in the commentary to his translation, Green finds that "like 96, [101] assumes the *possibility of communication* between the living and the dead."⁵⁷ But c. 101 is, as shown, predicated on the impossibility of communication: speech, like any gift (*munus*), is in fact not meaningfully shared with the dead. Were the situation otherwise, we would need to imagine c. 101's failed communication as being due not to an insurmountable metaphysical fact but to a particular difficulty, for example, Catullus's gifts are not pleasing or his dead brother is disinterested in them. I do not think that the speaker of c. 101 develops such a burlesque or grotesque image.

Likewise, neither does it seem right to read c. 96 as assuming the possibility of communicating with the dead in the sense Green seems to mean, that is, as a possibility realized as fact. In the poem, Catullus writes to Calvus, whose wife, Quintilia, has died:

If anything of our pain, Calvus, is able to fall pleasingly
 and well received on mute sepulchres—
 a desire by which we renew old loves
 and weep for friendships long missed—
 certainly death, although it be untimely, is of less pain 5
 for Quintilia than the pleasure she takes in your love.

Si quicquam mutis gratum acceptumue sepulcris
 accidere a nostro, Calue, dolore potest,
 quo desiderio ueteres renouamus amores
 atque olim missas flemus amicitias,
 certe non tanto mors immatura dolori est 5
 Quintiliae, quantum gaudet amore tuo.

The poem's opening lines comprise a present simple condition ("if *x* is the case, then *y* is the case").⁵⁸ As a result, their referent is not specified as being true in fact, only as not being known to be untrue (as would be the case in a condition contrary to fact). The Latin implies that maybe something can be received, maybe it cannot: Catullus either does not know or will not commit to such knowledge here. Although clearly intended to console, the lines thus do not offer much in the way of concrete hope. Green himself goes some way toward acknowledging this, calling vv. 1–2 "a faint, conditionally expressed hope."

But we must go further. The fact that the tombs are "mute," *mutis*, means that communication as such—shared language, an exchange of gifts—is excluded. Even if the dead do "receive" what we offer, there is no suggestion here that they offer anything in return. In this connection, we may note the verbal parallel between this hypothetical "receipt" or "acceptance," *acceptum*, and the command Catullus issues to his brother in vain in c. 101, "receive," *accipe* (v. 9). That parallel would seem to emphasize how any "acceptance" in c. 96 must be like that in c. 101, a purely conventional proposition that must be accepted or rejected by the giver, while the recipient is no longer a being in any satisfying way. Neither the giver nor the recipient has meaningful agency.⁵⁹

This precisely grammatical reading may be objected to on the grounds that it mistakes the poem's tone, clearly "consolatory" and so possibly also "hopeful." Perhaps the speaking subject does indeed

tacitly hope that the dead are able to know that the source of our grief is our affection or love as it goes now unrequited by them. I would say that Catullus's speaking subject, as we have come to know him in the death poems, would welcome that possibility. But he does not admit to that hope here or anywhere. As Biondi has well observed, Catullus, "a man of education and sense," "cannot go on believing that death is not the end of all or hoping that at least for a moment ritual restores feelings and words to the dead."⁶⁰ From this perspective, neither inclination on the part of the interpreter nor a perceived feeling on the part of the poet can change the fact that c. 96 is entirely conditional. Since it is not contrary to fact, it is indeed within the realm of the possible. But since it is only possible, it is not certain or necessarily actual.⁶¹

In this same connection we may also wonder whether Green goes too far in writing that two fragments from the poetry of Calvus "suggest that Quintilia was indeed represented by her husband as being in contact with him from the grave."⁶² The fragments in question are "when I shall already have become tawny ash" (*cum iam fulua cinis fuero*) and "perhaps even the ash itself may enjoy this" (*forsitan hoc etiam gaudeat ipsa cinis*). The first fragment represents a first-person speaker predicting his or her own cremation, presumably after death. Although it is explicit that something will happen after the death, as a statement by a speaker still living it does not necessarily imply that the speaker will experience something once deceased, much less be able to communicate. Without the main clause corresponding to that subordinate temporal clause we cannot say more than this. I would say then that this fragment, at least, does not give a positive reason to think that Calvus believed in the possibility of communication with the dead; of course it simply does not bear on whether Catullus shared a similar belief or, in order to console Calvus, feigned one. In this connection, it is important that "statements of fidelity after death on the part of either or both parties are conventional in epicedia."⁶³ Such conventional expressions need not represent sincere belief and, as we have seen with respect to c. 101, may actually run counter to what a given person, including the speaker, sincerely desires.

I suspect that the main clause wanted by the first fragment is not provided by the second fragment, for such close and unvaried repetition of *cinis* would not seem to be consonant with "neoteric" poetic practice. At any rate, the second fragment in itself likewise does not assume even the possibility of communication, much less suggest that Calvus imagined himself and Quintilia engaging in it. Calvus rather doubles up unrealized potential, combining "perhaps" (*forsitan*) with a potential

subjunctive (*gaudeat*). Although there might be hope, there is nothing necessarily linking that feeling about communication with even a claim about its possibility. Green himself notes the potential subjunctive as something that Catullus noted and changed (in mood from subjunctive to indicative) in “a neat gesture of consolation,” that is, making the realization of Calvus’s hope seem more possible.⁶⁴ But Green does not address the “perhaps” and, in my view, seems to miss the metaphysical consequence of the fact that Catullus’s consolation, which is the whole poem, is grammatically conditional.

Although c. 96 seeks to offer consolation, then, it must be a cold consolation indeed. Calvus is no more capable of receiving this poem meaningfully than, really, is the deceased Quintilia—like Catullus’s brother in c. 101—able to accept a living person’s expression of grief. As in the other death poems, so in c. 101 and c. 96 does the inefficacy of speech, poetry, or other cultural practice in the face of death serve to figure the speaker’s changed and diminished agency. Formerly a “doer” and “maker,” the poet in particular is reduced to little more than the limited set of his own inexpressible emotions, attempted expression of which only serves, in turn, to emphasize his inability—the impossibility—truly to communicate. Ostensibly a powerful being-in-language, the poet sees that his life has been dedicated—even sacrificed—to a supremely unresponsive silence. He is therefore reduced to desiring what he knows cannot be, or at least what he knows he himself cannot have or do.

This complicated situation is captured beautifully with reference to c. 96 by Davis. As he puts it, the “relationship [between the living and the dead] is summed up in one word, *desiderium*, the essence of a grief which reflects deep affection, the word on which the poem turns. If indeed the dead have sentience, then *desiderium* and the kind of love it reflects can turn the grief of the living into happiness for the dead.”⁶⁵ Davis is right that the essence of the feeling, on the part of the living, for the dead is “desire,” not of course a sexual perversion (this never enters the picture as Catullus paints it) but an intensification of the already deep affection felt during shared life.⁶⁶ If the dead can take pleasure in our grief, this likewise is not a perversion (a sort of *schadenfreude* on the part of the callous dead, although this, too, never enters the picture and seems not to have been considered by readers of the poem) but a right understanding of the fact that grief has its source in love.

Catullus in c. 96 thus “comments on the sense of permanent loss that accompanies the end of a true love affair, one based on more than desire. The living can only weep over the loss of such a relationship

since it is gone (*missas*) forever, and the *desiderium* can only cause grief over the irrevocable loss."⁶⁷ Davis's analysis shows how the structure of the poem emphasizes that complex relationship and, within it, the subtlety of the understanding that is possible on the part of the dead. Living "grief" or "pain" (*dolore* in v. 2, *dolori* in v. 5) hinges through living "desire" (*desiderio* in v. 3) to living "love" (both "love affairs," in v. 3's *ueteres . . . amores*, the same affairs regarded affectionately instead of erotically or ludically, in 4's *missas . . . amicitias*; and "love" in the abstract, in the concluding statement that Quintilia "delights in [Calvus's] love," v. 6's *gaudet amore tuo*). Davis then offers a reading that does not depend one way or another on the conditionality of it all: "If the feelings of the living can touch the dead, then the real meaning of grief is that it expresses a love in which that [*sic*] even the dead can rejoice." The conditional is acknowledged but seemingly disregarded as having any impact on the presentation of theme or on our interpretation of it. Thus, "the poem's structure is designed to convey this message clearly and concisely."⁶⁸

I do not disagree with the idea that the poem's effect depends on its structure, as noted earlier. But I am, then, surprised that the overall conditionality of the poem is paid relatively little attention as bearing on this interpretation. The present conditional sentence that comprises, as Davis notes, the entire poem implies by definition that *if* vv. 1–4 (protasis) *then* vv. 5–6 (apodosis). But also by definition, because of the mood of the verbs involved, the poem can make no claim about whether vv. 1–4, the condition, actually obtains. As a result, any consequence must be uncertain, a matter not of knowledge but merely—and more affectively—of hope. Such hope for communication and understanding with the dead must be small indeed. We have seen good reasons to think that the Catullus of the death poems considers it an impossibility. In the more general context of a poetics of silence, it is hard to imagine how he could feel otherwise. What meaning does utterance have when ranged against the natural silence of death? And what expectation could there be of that silence communicating any meaning?

Natural and Sociocultural Silences: C. 101 in the Context of Cc. 100 and 102

To round out our discussion of the death poems as they relate to silence, I conclude by putting c. 101 in the context of its bracketing cc. 100

("Caelius [destroys] Aufillenus and Quintius [destroys] Aufillena"; *Caelius Aufillenum et Quintius Aufillenam*) and 102 ("if anything has been entrusted by a friend to a faithful silence"; *si quicquam tacito commissum est fido ab amico*). Similarly to how c. 6, our first model for Catullus's poetics of silence, interacts with cc. 5 and 7, c. 101's interaction with cc. 100 and 102 further develops its engagement with silence. In chapter 2 we saw how c. 102 figures Catullus as "Harpocratic" in his own silence, likened to the god who is invested in silence in terms of his own faithfulness as a friend. There I suggested that the image may be deliberately exaggerated, an ironically ostentatious claim to keeping quiet. In the context of how Catullus's understanding of silence is affected by his brother's death, the image is open to further modification. In particular the question is whether Catullus has arranged his utterances and silences somehow incorrectly, revealing his failure as a poet and perhaps a related failure to live up to certain social and familial obligations.

Although c. 100 does not obviously involve silence as such, all three of these poems do raise the question of obligation. As we have seen, in the context of the natural silence of death, familial and social obligations seem to limit the lyric poet's agency with special relation to silence. No longer able to speak outrageously aloud what lies behind certain sociocultural silences, the poet is instead compelled to speak as would virtually any person in his position. In this way cc. 100 and 102 serve together to emphasize how the poet's relationship to silence is not completely or ultimately a matter of his choice or agency. Catullus's poetics of silence thus includes a sense of limitation to his being-in-language. Altogether, then, in these poems Catullus suggests that silence is both the condition of his poetic possibility and, ultimately, more than he may handle, or even wish to handle, in something like poetry alone. It is as if Catullus, faced by his brother's death with a debilitating version of the problem of expression, is reaching for a poetics of "beyond-silence," or perhaps for something that is not a "poetics" as such, an approach to poetry, at all.

In c. 102, Catullus claims that he "has been made into a Harpocrates"; or rather that his addressee, Cornelius, should think so; or rather, finally, that Cornelius may think so, for

if anything is entrusted to a faithful silence by a friend,
 the sort whose fidelity is marked deeply in the mind,
 you will find that I am equally bound by sacred oath,
 Cornelius, and have been made completely a Harpocrates.

Si quicquam tacito commissum est fido ab amico,
 cuius sit penitus nota fides animi,
 me aequae esse inuenies illorum iure sacratum,
 Corneli, et factum me esse puta Harpocraten.

From the poem's grammatical hedging, we may suspect that the poet's intent is ironical: it seems too much for Catullus, committed as he has been to ironies, to claim that he is guaranteed trustworthy as if by sacred oath. If the poem is thus ironic, then its concluding image is humorous instead of serious: Catullus as Harpocrates is, implicitly, not to be believed, whether for personal reasons that the addressee or other reader from Catullus's society would understand or perhaps for reasons characterizing that society more generally.

In other words, we may suspect that the question of what constitutes faithful behavior among friends, and therefore the question of which friends are to be considered faithful, are raised in the poem because they were—are—raised in life. In this poem in particular the questions are left open grammatically, as signaled by the conditional clause. That they were of more than passing interest to Catullus may be argued from the similarity of that conditional to the opening of c. 76: "If a man has any pleasure in recalling his earlier good deeds, since he thinks of himself as *pious*, as not having sullied any sacred trust" (vv. 1–3: *siqua recordanti benefacta priora uoluptas / est homini, cum se cogitat esse pium, / nec sanctam uiolasse fidem*). C. 102 seems to me more humorous than the serious c. 76. But the humorous image of Catullus as Harpocrates must suggest that "faithful silence" does not often enough obtain in the poet's lived experience. C. 102, too, thus figures the poet's Roman society as too intensively evaluative of interpersonal obligations. This feeling is intensified if the addressee of c. 102, Cornelius, is identified with the Cornelius (Nepos) intended by c. 1 to receive the *libellus* as a whole. C. 102 would then constitute something of a revision of that first programmatic poem's poetics. The friendly humor directed at the *libellus*'s addressee would thus give way to a more forcefully ironic reading, on the part of the poet, of how poetry is constrained not only by scrutiny within society but also now by the unmeaningfulness of language in relation to certain silence. Although we cannot be sure that the two addressees are the same Cornelius, we may yet say that, in the context of c. 101, c. 102 evokes how cultural practices ultimately must dissatisfy or fail. Society tries too hard to make a joke of what is really not wanted, and as a result the poet himself is stung.

Such feeling is present as well in c. 100. Here it takes the form of a more scathing response directed outward:

Caelius destroys Aufillenus, and Quintius Aufillena,
 the flower of Verona's youth,
 this one the brother, that one the sister. This is, as they say, that
 brotherly sodality, truly sweet.
 Whom am I to favor? Caelius, it's you: for only
 your friendship was seen by me from the fire,
 when a maddening flame turmoiled my marrows.
 May you be fortunate, Caelius, and may you be strong in love.

5

Caelius Aufillenum et Quintius Aufillenam
 flos Veronensum depereunt iuuenum,
 hic fratrem, ille sororem. hoc est, quod dicitur, illud
 fraternum uere dulce sodalicium.
 cui faueam potius? Caeli, tibi: nam tua nobis
 perspecta ex igni est unica amicitia,
 cum uesana meas torreret flamma medullas.
 sis felix, Caeli, sis in amore potens.

5

C. 100's more aggressive tone depends in part on its addressee, Caelius, being in several poems a target of Catullus's least ambiguous attacks because figured as a source of his most deeply hurt feelings.⁶⁹ As one of Lesbia's lovers, Caelius serves as a lightning rod for Catullus's unhappiness and anger at the fact of her "infidelity" to Catullus (e.g., cc. 69–71). Caelius's depiction here is an extension of his libidinous activity elsewhere, figured as excessively aggressive. He is properly the recipient of Catullus's "favor" because of how his "friendship" with Catullus was "unique," but such "favor" must be understood ironically, even sarcastically insofar as Caelius's "friendship" was, from Catullus's perspective, bad. The intensity of Catullus's experience is emphasized by the vivid language of those lines, drawing on imagery traditional to love poetry including the lover as afflicted by his feelings for the beloved. The phrase a "flame turmoiled my marrows" vividly imagines Catullus's love affair, presumably with Lesbia given the reference to Caelius, as something that afflicted him deeply. He was consumed enough for his perspective to be dominated by that "fire" (*igni*, v. 6, with fire imagery thus doubled).⁷⁰ We may also say that he was confused enough by the flames of his love for his perspective and judgment to be clouded, as if by smoke. From among the flames he could see only Caelius's *amicitia* . . . but, as implied by the poem's refusal to evaluate

that friendship explicitly positively, he failed to see that such “friendship” is not desirable.

C. 100 thus purports to record Catullus thinking about the theory and practice of friendship, indeed rethinking what it means for people to be interconnected and what, in the end, we are to do with the fact that their experiences of one another may be wildly uneven, in particular with utterance and silence in a sort of uncongenial imbalance. We may link c. 100 to cc. 101 and 102 in terms of how all three represent just this sort of rethinking of the fluid facts of social interactions in the more concrete, and therefore possibly more amenable, form of poetry. The presence in these poems of images of fluidity, liquidity, dryness, and concrete solids or even precipitates allows the poetry to articulate that tension in Catullus’s lived experience. The vivid confrontations in that sort of language are stronger in that they help Catullus either to frame his response to what otherwise might seem mere abstractions or, perhaps more precisely, to discover that what he took to be a fair degree of fluidity is in fact only a subtlety of rhetorical practice.

Catullus’s discovery here has much to do with relationships including “friendship,” *amicitia* and, in c. 100, *sodalitium*, “close association.” Just as *amicitia* has turned out to be something other than what it may have seemed, so has the meaning of *sodalitium* been narrowed by experience. It still means “close association.” But it is an association from which Catullus is excluded: he does not participate in Caelius’s and Quintius’s “deflowerings” of Aufillenus and Aufillena but only regards them from without, passing judgment and so providing the only utterance. It may be that all four others are occupied in ways that limit their ability to speak meaningfully, with the deflowerers going mindlessly about their tasks while the deflowerees, per discussion earlier in chapter 2, find their speech occluded. For that matter, even unblocked speech is no guarantee of meaningful utterance: not everyone is able to fashion poetic silk purses out of the sows’ ears of personal experience. More significantly, the “association” here is of a sort for which Catullus feels mainly contempt, not to say disapproval . . . even as we may detect a quiet desire that the “friendship” and “close association” still include him, so long as it is still good and true. This is a sort of social reflex of the poetics of silence operative in c. 55, where, as we saw in the introduction, Catullus as poet is equally happy with utterance or silence from his associates, “so long as [they] let [him] share in [their] love” (v. 22: *dum uestri sim particeps amoris*).

When, then, Catullus writes that “this is, as they say, that brotherly

sodality, truly sweet" (vv. 3–4: *hoc est, quod dicitur, illud / fraternum uere dulce sodalicium*), it serves to capture this complex of feelings, and especially the scathing sarcasm must be clear. The piling up of demonstratives, *hoc* and *illud*, has Catullus pointing and, so, revealing the distance at which he must stand so as to evaluate. The demonstratives combine with the juxtaposition of "truly sweet" to suggest the poet's angrily ironic attitude. For the phrasing, *hoc est quod dicitur*, we may compare 94. 2, "this is as they say" (*hoc est quod dicunt*): referring to Mentula's adultery as confirmed according to public speech, this suggests that a special force for c. 100's *hoc est* is the belatedness of Catullus's discovery that "friendship" and "sodality" are not what he had thought, as it turns out naively.⁷¹

This reading may be strengthened by the further juxtaposition in the collection between this sort of "brotherly sodality," tart or acid, and the bittersweet brotherly love in c. 101. There Catullus experiences the sharpness of his brother's absence because, by implication, the relationship itself was a source of sweetness for the speaker. So far as c. 101 is concerned, not to mention the other death poems, there would seem to be no question of Catullus and his brother having shared the sort of thing c. 100 attributes to Caelius and Quintius. Indeed, the slight suggestion of c. 68(a) that Catullus's brother helped to underwrite the poet's happiness in love, and so in writing even titillating love poetry, implies by contrast that the brother's life somehow allowed Catullus to continue imagining "love" as truer and more faithful than it has turned out to be, faithful at all, perhaps for a longer time than he would have managed on his own. So far as Catullus is concerned, it is then something of an insult that a brotherhood like that of Caelius's and Quintius's, alleged to be debauched and debased, is allowed to continue while his own, evidently pure, even too untouched, is cut off.

Natural Silence as a Permanent Impossibility of Meaning

Catullus's images of social and familial obligations in cc. 100–102 serve to exemplify how even—especially?—the poet does not have control over meanings. Utterance gives way to silence not as he, or we, might wish, but as silence itself seems to will. From this perspective, the feeling of loss that we have seen pervading the death poems is more sharply defined as a particular instance of what Catullus has discovered is a more general rule. As Catullus sees it in certain poems, the

untrustworthiness of words causes even those social interactions that have gone unpoetic(ized)—there is no trace of Catullus's brother in the poetry until after his death—ultimately to fail or, perhaps more precisely, to have been misrepresented. Words and the world may interact, but in the end they do not correspond. In part this is because, in the end, there is silence. Although utterance may affect an individual's lived experience, it does not follow that an individual's utterance may be counted on to shape his experience in ways that are consistently meaningful or even tolerable. Knowing as he does that this lack of correspondence between words and the world is caused sometimes by human (dis)ingenuity, other times by the eventual incapacity of even the most ingenious human utterance to withstand natural silence, the poet falls into a literary or linguistic sort of learned helplessness. His actions have little or unpredictable results, and his agency is in fact not his own.

In this connection we see, again, a possible explanation for Catullus's apparent refusal to write traditional epic, a reason that goes beyond the poetic or aesthetic. Although artistic preferences are certainly involved, Catullus's unironic refusal in fact—as opposed to an ironic *recusatio*—would seem to be determined more directly by his sense of dissatisfaction with the metaphysical situation. Catullus cannot have written an ordinary epic because in the context of a poetics of silence he is unable to believe that poetry does what epic claims to do. In part because of his personal experience, poetry does *not* seem to balance out the natural silence of death with the perpetual utterance ideally comprised by immortality in culture. As I hear the death poems, Catullus seems to feel instead that epic, and therefore much of subsequent poetry, depends on death too much to fight it. As utterance, poetry is paradoxically too complicit a partner in death's natural silence to sound as loudly as the living, in their inexpressible grief, would require.

In the context of that absolute silence, the survival of something like a poem, its continued speech both dependent on and drowning out a meaningfully interpersonal human utterance, must seem a matter not of individual agency or choice but of historical accident, of chance. Thus in c. 101, Catullus says farewell to his brother in a way he feels must be final and forever: “forever, my brother, hail and goodbye” (v. 10: *atque in perpetuum, frater, aue atque uale*).⁷² Among its many other resonances, some of which I have noted with reference to scholarship, the farewell evokes Catullus's sense of the impermanence of utterance, no matter how poetic, in contrast to the everlasting silence that awaits us all.⁷³ The line thus powerfully suggests that all language users are ultimately

subjected to a range of silences that prevent expression and, in the end, themselves prove unamenable to utterance. Catullus's language here is rather formal or even ritualistic, and the result is a feeling of resignation. As if in tacit recognition of such language's incapacity for true, personal expression, the poem focuses on the exteriors of things: the sea voyage rather than the voyager himself; ashes in place of the formerly living body; Catullus's tears on the outside of gifts that go unspecified. Onto such things, too, are emotional terms displaced away from the speaker: only the brother is "miserable," while other such descriptions are applied to objects.

Those transferred epithets quietly suggest a person who is at some paradoxical distance from himself. This is consonant with what we have seen of the poetic situation. Most basically, in c. 101 "Catullus" the poet, the speaking subject, finally addresses his brother when Catullus, the historical person, cannot. He thus attempts to speak for the first time, to make good on a linguistic potential, only when the last opportunity for actual conversation has already passed. By the time he thinks to call out an utterance, the only response can be silence. In this connection, leaving aside the ordinary ironies of composition in which we might imagine the poet composing (long) after the event, we may note that the poem does not depict the poet on a return voyage home. So far as c. 101 is concerned, Catullus is not—and may never be—any closer to home than is his brother. Both are rather, "and forever," trapped on the Trojan shore of epic, impersonal memory. It is a borderland, between the infamous sand and the inhospitable sea. The ancient fear of being dead and unburied, food for dogs and carrion birds, laps at the poem's edges, like the water at the brother's foot. The poet is completely and permanently displaced.

Postscript on a Poetics of Absolute Silence

In a poetics of silence, silence is constituted as a sign, serving as a figure open to interpretation in its own right or as a ground against which other figures, other signs, may be interpreted. Recent work on silence in literature and culture has thus offered a useful corrective to a possible misconception of silence as simple absence. Clearly silence does not, or need not, completely lack meaning; when treated as part of a semiotic system, it may of course be made to signify.

But there remains a sense that certain kinds of silence, perhaps

especially at certain times, may seem to be absolute and thus to signify nothing. Such absolute silence seems less open to interpretation, as if it is an absence that could not be made meaningfully present no matter the quantity or kinds of interpretations made of it. Such silence would seem to be—not to signify but to be—the very absence of meaning. In this way the experience that informs a poetics of silence, an experience of sociocultural silences that conduce to active exercise of the poetic imagination, can be countered, so far as beings-in-language are concerned, by the absolute silence of death. The fact that it is natural does not change our experience of it as singular.

By way of conclusion, we might reflect on these readings in light of Fitzgerald's compelling and beautiful

outlining [of] the issues raised by the death of Catullus's brother in these poems. First, if the poet cannot communicate with his brother across the grave, then where does the poem go and who is it for? . . . Secondly, if the death of his brother occupies the faithful poet's mind completely, then how can he write of other subjects and from other motives? . . . Finally, the fact that his brother dies at Troy, most ancient and prestigious of places in Roman history, and then sends the poet to the place of his origin, provincial Verona, precipitates an anxious exploration of the poet's complicated cultural affiliations.⁷⁴

Communication, poetic composition, and cultural and social affiliation are indeed central issues raised in the poems by the death of Catullus's brother. And Fitzgerald is not wrong to argue that "all of these poems are concerned with displacement." What I have sought to show is that the death poems are all, in important ways and to a great degree, inflected by Catullus's demonstrable interest in silence. His understanding of silence, however sophisticated, complicated, and artistic, is placed under great and perhaps intolerable pressure when the poet must respond to the absolute, natural silence of death.

6

“Feminized” Voices and Their Silences, Part 1

C. 64

Hear my lovely complaints!

64.195: *meas audite querellas*

In the preceding chapters we have seen how the poems’ impression of being overheard comes in part from the attention Catullus pays to various silences. When he seems to speak aloud, it is in the context of at least one other potential speaker’s silence. Examples of this basic situation have ranged from the pauses that help to structure conversation by making it a true “turn taking”; through the sort of concealment that, ironically, conduces to outrageous poetry by provoking in the poet a desire for disclosure or other violation of linguistic taboos; to the absolute silence of death, whose meaninglessness would seem to call all meaning into question. Whether the arrangement of speakers, utterances, and silences in a poem corresponds to historical fact, including any personal feeling on the part of the poet, is strictly irrelevant to the poem’s success as a fiction. It bears emphasizing that, as a result, silences in Catullus are subject to intentional fictionalizations. I have therefore tried to argue that, as a result, an interest in silence should be reckoned among Catullus’s most intentional literary acts. In this way Catullus may indeed be described as having a poetics of silence.

At the same time, however, Catullus is not completely free to fictionalize as he chooses. He as well as his characters are in a way fictionalized—fashioned—more profoundly by silence. We have examined this

limitation on the poet's agency primarily in terms of the problem of expression: searching, as Eliot puts it, for "the least wrong words," the poet finds his or her personal expression limited by discourses and cultural practices. Insofar as the poet figures himself as an exemplary language user, he must experience this as quite profoundly limiting indeed. Not only is his wonted, wittily ironic language ultimately limited in meaning, but also affected is his own and his subjects' more fundamental being-in-language. While ordinarily one is called into being by language, a poetics of silence makes clear that one's being is also defined—literally limited—by silence. Indeed it seems that language or utterance and silence are inseparable: if it is our nature to be *heard or listened into being*, then the fact that we are variously and ultimately subject to silence cannot but have serious consequences for our being.¹ Try as we might to be heard or to hear others, a part of our being-in-language consists in its going unheard.

From this perspective, Catullus cannot completely control the silences experienced by potential speakers. Much less may he overcome those silences: in fact he depends on them, via processes of suppression, exclusion, and appropriation. In this way Catullus's poetics of silence stands to reveal not only the intentionality of his art but also his awareness of the limits imposed on language users precisely as they are entered into discourse. To develop this argument further, in this chapter I focus on poems featuring the voices of women or otherwise "feminized" figures, including the poet himself as he is figured at certain points. In general, we may say that a traditionally masculine discourse, and with it those soundscapes that likewise privilege the masculine, operate in part via the suppression, exclusion, and appropriation of feminine voices and sounds. Although certain women are singled out as having had effects on the public realm, in general women's entrance into discourse in antiquity was, by modern standards, heavily constrained.

This sort of "silencing" has received much critical attention.² Catullus himself has been a rich source in this connection because of the wide range of his appropriations, including poems and narrative persona(e) who speak in voices ranging over traditional masculine and feminine types as well as more innovative developments and mixtures. We have seen, for example, that in c. 16 (discussed in chapter 2) Catullus frames his sense of an ideal poetry's wit in part along an axis of masculinity and femininity, insisting that the former open to redefinition in terms of the latter. We have also seen that Catullus may adopt as his own a feminized, even biologically female, perspective more explicitly: in c. 68(a)

(discussed in chapter 4) he describes his incapacity to compose erotic poetry in terms that suggest frustrated sexual reproduction, and in c. 65 (discussed in chapters 4 and 5) he likens his own diminished agency to that of a girl whose familial obligations seem to loom large as, in one possible interpretation, she is discovered to be pregnant illegitimately.

The same evidence also shows, however, that Catullus does not completely escape the limits of gendered behavior established and reinforced by traditional discourses and cultural practices including poetry. That he would emphasize his feelings of incapacity and inadequacy by likening himself to a woman, in a way that is clearly intended to be comprehensible to his readers, says a great deal about how feminine language and silence are understood. We must therefore distinguish Catullus's sensitivity to discursive limits to the feminine and masculine from a modern feminism, which in general would link such sensitivity to an active interest in social and cultural change. The latter interest is virtually absent from Greco-Roman antiquity; Catullus may wish for many things to be different, but I think that we would be wrong to read his poems as tending towards social activism.

Instead, we might say that in poems featuring feminized voices, the potential for social activism is replaced by a kind of intersubjective ventriloquism, in which the true speaker is the poet himself, albeit taking on aspects of the persona. The narrative personae of Catullus's poems speak in voices that range over the masculine and the feminine, the male and the female as well as their various intermediations. In certain poems, Catullus seems to be speaking in "his own" voice, even as "his" conscious voice adopts certain aspects of utterance that might be felt to be feminized: "his" voice is, in certain ways to certain readers at least, a "her" voice. This complicates Catullus's relationship to silence, in that he is able to adopt as his own what readers have felt to be women's modes or feminine modes by performing a silencing of women's voices. The male poet is thus positioned relatively farther from silence than are his female or otherwise feminized subjects. Despite what he feels at certain points is his own tendency, as a being-in-language, toward meaningless silence, Catullus's poetics of silence is thus in part active in that some poems comprise utterances by masculine figures that seem to depend on a traditional silencing of women.

A first example of this was our very first poem, c. 6 (discussed in chapter 1), in which Flavius's girlfriend does not speak and is not even named. A second, treated piecewise at several earlier points, was c. 10, in which Catullus depicts himself seeking actively, somewhat desperately,

and in the event fruitlessly to control a woman's contribution to conversation.³ Other poems likewise show Catullus attempting to control women's speech (and for that matter other behaviors). At the same time, c. 10 and some others do represent women's speech directly, albeit more often as reported by the male narrator than with women serving as narrators themselves or even given voice as dramatic characters. Some few poems do include substantial portions voiced by women characters, including cc. 62 ("The evening star is there, O youths: rise together. From Olympus the evening star"; *Vesper adest, iuvenes: consurgite. Vesper Olympo*) and 64 ("Once, from Peliacan heights the offspring pines"; *Peliaco quondam prognatae uertice pinus*). Each of these poems deserves separate study for the light it may shed on how Catullus's appropriation of feminized voices involves certain silencings of women.

In this chapter I focus on c. 64; in chapter 7 I turn to c. 63 and c. 51. C. 64 provides images of feminine voices in various settings and conditions. One voice in particular, Ariadne's, resonates not only with Catullus's in certain poems but also with the singular c. 63, whose protagonist, Attis, mixes male and female, masculine and feminine. Attis forms a sort of triad with Ariadne in c. 64 and Catullus himself in c. 101, as all three are left behind on a distant shore, displaced from society and therefore effectively silenced. In this way appropriation of otherwise silenced feminine voices serves to figure the male poet's anxiety about his own subjection to sociocultural silence in discourse and, ultimately, his natural silence in death. My final example is c. 51, in which Catullus seems to speak in his own voice, in full and exclusive possession of his own "lyric consciousness," but which is in fact a translation of a poem by Sappho, a female poet from Archaic Greece. Connections between these poems and c. 6 will take us full circle, allowing for some concluding comments about Catullus's poetics of silence.

Feminized Utterance and Silence in C. 64

Our first example of Catullus's representations of women's voices and silences is the "epyllion," or "little epic," of c. 64.⁴ We may consider four linked themes. First, there is silence as a figure for, and function of, mortality. Second, there is traditional utterance, perhaps especially epic poetry, as it claims to offer immortality in culture. Third, there are the materialities of silence, utterance, and memory: their embodiment,

including especially their relationship to speakers' bodies. Fourth and finally, there is the way in which utterance and silence are complicated by facts and fictions of gender. To consider these themes all together I focus on how Catullus voices, and vividly silences, the characters of Ariadne and the Parcae. These voices and silences of these women or feminized figures echo Catullus's self-expression in other poems: he narrates, and is narrated in turn by, characters marked as female. This serves to further and to deepen the feeling that in order for utterance to occur, other speakers must go unheard.

RELATIVE SILENCE IMPOSED ON THE PARCAE

Although c. 64 is formally framed by a description of the wedding of Thetis and Peleus, the poem has seemed to readers to be preoccupied by the story of Ariadne and therefore Theseus (roughly vv. 50–264).⁵ The wedding is the subject of the poem's narrative as such, while the story of Ariadne and Theseus is properly an ekphrasis, or extended description of a work of art: the narrator's description of a "coverlet" (v. 50: *haec uestis*) for the wedding bed prompts him to recall and narrate the story more completely than it seems to be depicted on the coverlet.⁶ Ariadne's story corresponds to that frame in important ways, as well as to the theme of marriage, which informs many of the long poems (cc. 61–68). But Ariadne herself has stood out to readers rather more by contrast, as she is used and left stranded by Theseus and thus requires sympathy instead of being celebrated as part of a happier pair.⁷ With Catullus's poetics of silence in mind, we may say that Ariadne offers the poet a special opportunity to give voice to how a woman's situation is discursively and pragmatically constrained by men's decisions or actions, including utterance and other meaningful action. C. 64 may thus develop further the suggestion of c. 101 and others that even "epic" discourse, despite its promise of immortality in culture or even in order to fulfill that promise, imposes and depends on silence of especially unbreakable kinds. C. 64 thus draws power from the paradox that a woman's effective silence—Ariadne, as abandoned woman and as woven image, cannot be "heard" in an ordinary way—allows the poet some of his own most affective utterance. In this way Ariadne's status as a fictional character, in particular as she is an object for masculine audiences and a male author, serves to illustrate a discursive condition that must apply to other women. In a word, Ariadne exemplifies how feminized figures—real as well as mythological—are as it were

abandoned or stranded in traditionally masculine discourse. As we will see, this metaphor links Ariadne to Attis in c. 63 as well as to Catullus himself in c. 101.

Perhaps more directly, the relationship between the poem's speaking subject and its quieted object of attention also parallels certain others elsewhere in the corpus, for example between Catullus and Flavius's girlfriend in c. 6. Unlike the silences in those poems, Ariadne's effective silence has seemed vivid enough to preoccupy the poem in the eyes of many readers. In particular Ariadne has overshadowed not only Thetis and Peleus, who are hardly characterized and are given nothing to say, but also the Parcae. This is remarkable in that the Parcae, by contrast to the other characters, have a great deal to say (their song is second in length in the poem only to Ariadne's lament) and say it in a way that is explicitly marked as both meaningful and memorable. Instead of speaking, the Parcae sing. This aligns their utterance with the poem as a whole, whose speaking subject likewise "sings," and so with the commemorative function traditionally attributed to epic poetry (v. 24: *meo uos carmine compellabo*; the *uos* here refers to *heroes*, epic protagonists). Moreover, the narrator says that their "singings [are] truth tellings," and they themselves refer to it as a "truth-telling oracle" (v. 306: *ueridicos . . . cantus*, and v. 326: *ueridicum oraclum*, respectively). Underwriting their claim to truth, the narrator says further that their "song [is] divine" (vv. 321–22: *diuino . . . carmine*); this also emphasizes the peculiar nature of the wedding scene, in which human and divine mix in a way no longer matched in the narrator's times.⁸ Finally, all is sung with "clear-resounding voice" (v. 320: *clarisona . . . uoce*), as if in some sharp aesthetic contrast to the infirmity of the singers' aging bodies, which "tremble" or "shake" as if with tremors of age and which they move with evident difficulty (v. 307: *corpus tremulum*, and v. 305: *infirmis quatientes corpora motu*, respectively).

The contrast between the Parcae's clear voices and their halting motions may invite comparison of them to a (tragic) chorus, which could comment on the action in the form of singing while dancing.⁹ In contrast, while the Parcae sing only their hands are in motion, as they weave raw wool into the lines of mortal lives.¹⁰ Evidently they have exceedingly strong and nimble fingers: their "hands were taking up correctly the everlasting labor" (v. 310: *aeternumque manus carpebant rite laborem*). This complicated task involves "the left hand keeping hold of the distaff covered in soft wool, while the right shapes the threads, lightly drawn out, with upturned fingers [and] with downturned thumb spinning

the spindle" (vv. 311–14: *laeua colum molli lana retinebat amictum, / dextera tum leuiter deducens fila supinis / formabat digitis, tum prono in pollice torquens . . . fusum*). The complete description of the Parcae's spinning is striking indeed, in particular for the ease with which these ancient women manage the complicated interaction of parts including delicate thread.¹¹ They do so offhandedly, in a way that emphasizes their skill and dexterity and may also suggest, ambiguously, both the technical care and the indifference with which that thread—the very stuff of human lives—is treated. That such absentmindedness affects women especially is confirmed by what we may call the unmindfulness of Theseus: he is *immemor*, "unmindful," at v. 58, the narrator's description, and v. 135, Ariadne's description. The match between Catullus's and Ariadne's descriptions is only one among many moments of feeling shared between the two; this common consideration for feminized experience is discussed further later in this chapter.

THE WEDDING AS AN ENTRANCE INTO SILENCE

In the meantime, to delve further into the gendered consequences of the contrast, we may note a second, parallel contrast in c. 64: between the Parcae's white robes and their red or purple borders, the last so far as we can tell a Catullan addition, vv. 308–9.¹² Thomson calls this a "red-white contrast, dear to Roman poets in particular."¹³ Catullus's love of this contrast should be clear, to take examples only from poems discussed already, from cc. 65 (implicitly white maiden and robe, implicitly red apple) and 80 (Gellius's *rosea labella*, "little red lips," have become *candidiora niue*, "whiter than snow"). But those two poems also make clear that the contrast easily, even naturally, suggests sexuality and/or sexual(ized) violence, with white standing for skin and red for blood. Since their song serves as a wedding song, or *epithalamium*, we may wonder whether the Parcae's manner of dress suggests the traditional, ideal bloodstain of bedsheets on the first morning after, proving the bride's virginity.

The possibility may be strengthened, first, by reference to vv. 376–77, where the Parcae evoke a complementary morning-after tradition in which the bride's nurse tests for consummation by measuring the bride's neck with a string: if the string does not fit the morning after as it did the night before, consummation is proven. This second tradition may well be read as "introducing an element of 'fescennine' erotic jesting" to the poem.¹⁴ But the fact that it centers on a "string" (*filo*, v. 376) must also tie the Parcae's song to Catullus's own song or poem,

the central relationship in which includes the fact that Theseus, having shed the Minotaur's blood, finds his way out of the labyrinth by following the "string" or "thread" (again *filo*, v. 113) provided by Ariadne.¹⁵ The Parcae's song depicts the marriage as resulting in unprecedented bloodshed. In perhaps the most vivid example, the Scamander River will "witness [Achilles's] great achievements: . . . its journey narrowed by piles of slaughtered bodies, it will warm its flows mixed deep with gore" (vv. 357–60: *testis erit . . . unda Scamandri. . . cuius iter caesis angustans corporum aceruis / alta tepefaciet permixta flumina caede*). Catullus's song, the poem as such, depicts Ariadne and Theseus's relationship similarly as depending on bloodshed: the Minotaur's loss of life explicitly (Theseus "lays him flat, his body beaten"; v. 110: *domito . . . prostravit corpore*) and Ariadne's loss of virginity by implication. The detail of the string, in conjunction with the image of the Parcae's dress, thus serves to emphasize how blood is drawn by Theseus from both half-siblings.

It may not be too much to say that a marriage, or more precisely the sexual component of a marriage and in particular the wedding night, is anticipated for Theseus as a sort of reward for his having dared to stop the ritual sacrifice of children to the Minotaur. In other words, it is as if blood must be shed, innocence or even virginity confirmed and lost, one way or another. From our perspective, this would be from some feminized figure or another as suggested by traditional symbols of sexuality. It would seem, then, that the Parcae, like the bride's proverbial nurse, know what a young girl stands to experience as she becomes a wife. The verbal and other formal echoes already noted suggest that Catullus, too, intends these details to be symbolic for that real feminine coming-of-age.

This suggestion seems confirmed by details of a moment near the end of the Parcae's song. Having sung of Achilles's "heroic deeds" (*uir-tutes*), the Parcae turn to focus on his death, which will be dignified with human sacrifice: his "mound will receive a struck-down virgin's snow-white limbs" (vv. 363–64: *bustum / excipiet niueos percussae uirginis artus*).¹⁶ This implies the same red-white contrast described earlier, as the vivid red of the virgin's blood contrasts with the explicit white of her limbs. We may even imagine the contrast growing starker as she exsanguinates and, as a result, grows paler.¹⁷ The contrast and the violence that causes it are developed further in the following section of the song; at the same time, pathos is deepened as the "virgin" is identified: "the tall tombs will drip with Polyxena's gore, and she, falling forward from the double-bladed axe like a sacrificial animal, will throw her headless

body down on bended knee" (vv. 368–70: *alta Polyxenia madefient caede sepulcra; / quae, uelut ancipiti succumbens uictima ferro, / proiciet truncum summisso poplite corpus*).¹⁸ This vivid, indeed violent color imagery helps the Parcae's song to travesty wedding, consummation of marriage, and childbearing. When, then, Catullus calls the content of the song "such blessings" (v. 382: *talia felicia*), we may be sure that he speaks ironically.

DISCOURSE, AND DISCOMFITURE HIDDEN FROM VIEW

We may thus not be surprised when the Parcae's song in c. 64 turns out to focus on how the interaction of private or domestic and public or political/marital is inevitably depersonalizing, especially for women or otherwise feminized figures. All is constrained here by traditional modes of measuring (figuratively and literally) a woman's worth. For a sense of this we need only think of how the tradition evaluates Pasiphaë's desires and their product, the monstrous Minotaur. Although the Minotaur is male, he is hidden from view as if a sort of feminized figure himself. This suggests that his mother's particular perversion is treated as a token of a more generally discomfiting feminine type. Hidden from view as women would be according to traditional masculine discourse and cultural practice, the Minotaur symbolizes the intimate connection between birth and death, a boundary crossing, in the form of blood that must be shed. Since Catullus has sought in certain ways to excuse himself from men's traditional activities, such constrictive measures apply to some degree to him, too. We may say, then, that the silence that awaits us all in death is specified by the Parcae's song as applying especially to women or otherwise feminine figures already in this life.

If the Parcae's song thus represents a sort of insight into the silence that is made to characterize the feminized condition, part of the purpose of c. 64 is to rail against how such insight is disregarded in prevailing discourse. The story breaks off just after the Parcae have finished singing. As a result, we are not given to know how the song was received by the wedding guests or by the marrying couple. In this connection, we may wonder again about Thetis's and Peleus's happiness as a pair. Does Catullus expect readers to interpret Thetis's positive interest in the pairing as a change from tradition, such that here, too, is an example of how a woman's subjective experience is not accurately the stuff of epic commemoration? In a similar vein, readers have also noted that the story, in ending at this point, does not include its usually crucial

moment: the uninvited arrival of Eris, goddess of strife, who prompted the "Judgment of Paris," in which Paris must select who among Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite deserves a golden apple from the Garden of the Hesperides; Paris's selection of Aphrodite, and through it Eris's instigation, incites the Trojan War. There can be no doubt that Catullus knew this famous story. As a result, the narrator must be credited with suppressing it purposefully.

From the perspective developed here, the suppression of this crucial and consequential moment may be read as emphasizing the difficulty of entering the experience of women and otherwise feminized figures into traditional public discourse. The narrator's sequel rather implies that the perspective offered by the Parcae was received incompletely, if at all. He goes on to rail against the fact that the close association of mortals and divine beings is now impossible as a result of human impiety (vv. 384–408). This would seem to stress the simple fact of the Parcae's attendance as a sign of the guests' admixture of human and divine, rather than any more-lasting effect of their singing. The feeling is somewhat bleak. What would it have meant for their song to be attended to, in that—no matter an individual's feeling or understanding—it is certain to come true?

If this is of a piece with oracles in ancient literature, virtually none of which is rightly heeded, it also shows that even these divine women's voices do not command attention. The poet I think dislikes that situation and its cause, seeming thus to recommend a pious attention indeed. But by breaking off the story as he does, he composes his own poem as an image of disregard and its consequences. This is not mitigated but only modulated by the similarity between the Parcae's markedly epic singing and the poet's own "miniature epic." That the narrator, by default a "he," is heard no more attentively than they are does not compensate for the fact that those women are indeed not heard. Here the poem gives a strong impression of the personal feeling that may be attached to the public or discursive loss of agency marking entrance into more-mature responsibility. We have seen in our discussion of c. 65 that Catullus figures his own experience of this by likening it to a woman's sexual maturation. It is a feeling quite like despair but worsened by what is felt, further, to be a lack of access to traditionally memorable forms of expression and the limited consolations they provide. As I read c. 64, then, Catullus cannot stand to know, as intensely as he has come to, that utterance is not free but constrained. This feeling seems most powerfully expressed, in ways expected to be comprehensible to his readers,

in figurations of women: in themselves, as they relate to men including him, and—most significantly—as he is aligned with them in figures like Ariadne and, to be discussed in chapter 7, Attis.

To round out the present discussion, we may note the structure of the Parcae's song, with a refrain that breaks up their predictions about Thetis and Peleus's offspring, Achilles: "run along leading the woof, run along you spools" (first at v. 327: *currite ducentes subtegmina, currite fusi*), referring to the Parcae's weaving. This structure to the Parcae's song parallels how the first quotation, "singings [are] truth tellings," that is, the first moment of the Parcae's entrance into the poem's discourse, as well as the first suggestion that they will sing, is separated from the actual moment of their singing by the elaborated description (vv. 307–19) of their simultaneous weaving. Again, then, the narrator and the Parcae are drawn in parallel, as each structures singing in a similar manner. That description, moreover, makes clear that Catullus intends a close association between the singing and the weaving.

In turn, this serves to suggest that the Parcae, who weave, and Ariadne, who as we have already started to see has been woven and is otherwise closely associated with "strings" or "threads" (*fila*), are to be considered just as closely together. A natural distinction might be between weaving and what we may call "being woven," with the Parcae therefore both more active and in a way more real than Ariadne, whose passivity suggests that she occupies a sort of "secondary reality." This would parallel the difference between speaking and being spoken, being hailed or listened into being, discussed earlier. But Catullus seems to play with the cultural figuration of weaving as an activity, even the primary activity, of women in the home. The image of weaving may thus symbolize the subordination, and with it the silence, of all the feminized characters.¹⁹ This symbolism is echoed in images of spooling and unspooling, as well as contrastive images of concealment and exposure. As we will see, then, Ariadne's own situation is more strained: she does not so much weave as unweave, unspooling a thread so as to lead a man away from the feminized enclosure he has penetrated so as to bring about a death and then exposing herself to the masculine gaze with equally disastrous consequences.

THE POEM'S SILENCES AND THE NARRATOR'S INTERSUBJECTIVE VENTRILOQUISM

Especially in light of the death poems and their collective response to "epic," c. 64's presentation of the Parcae's song, its reception, and its

effective subordination to Ariadne's lament combine to make a meta-poetic point. The point is made about epic in particular and about the conditions of poetry's truth telling more generally, including commemoration and capacity to cause a gendered subject to break from silence into utterance. The narrator and the Parcae converge in their descriptions (as noted, he refers to their *cantus* as *ueridicos*, they to their *oraculum* likewise as *ueridicum*), but there is a difference. In this connection, we may note the periphrastic expressions that pervade the poem: "they say," "it is said," "they claim," and "they say," all of which attribute important moments in the stories to speech and/or knowledge other than the narrator's.²⁰

Such periphrasis allows the narrator a kind of inclusiveness as well as scope for variation on certain themes. For example, it has been argued, as noted earlier, that Catullus innovates by making Thetis and Peleus fall in love at first sight and remain, for the time covered by his narration, a happy couple.²¹ I do not think, however, that the main purpose of such innovation is to emphasize Catullus's dependence on tradition as an attempt to secure goodwill, a *captatio beneuolentiae*, before he apologizes for his deviations from it. In the context of his poetics of silence, as we have seen he delights in overhearing and repeating aloud what otherwise would have gone unheard and been kept silent.

In this context, we may understand the poem's periphrastic expressions as emphasizing how the story exemplifies material only barely recovered from the silence that could have taken it completely. This helps to account for the hold Ariadne has on the poem, and has had on its readers, in a way that has made Thetis and Peleus less compelling by contrast. Paradoxically, Ariadne's story is more compelling precisely in that it seems to be overheard with greater difficulty, out of silences of more oppressive force and greater complexity. On this reading, the narrator's periphrastic expressions signal his dependence on others for his material as well as the inadequacy of traditional stories in expressing emotional commitment to such material. He goes some way toward breaking that discursive silence by appropriating Ariadne's voice, achieving a kind of intersubjective ventriloquism.

Of course, any sympathy for the character is not purely for its own sake. Catullus's representation of feminized voices and stories in the poem, *as* the poem, is a kind of appropriation indeed, conducting as it does to his own ideally praiseworthy achievement in art. While all his sources are represented as only "saying" (the basic meaning of all the periphrastic expressions collected in n. 20), the speaking subject actu-

ally "sings." In this way Catullus's activity as the poet of c. 64 is elevated over the utterance of his sources; this in turn imposes on them a relative silence. Since his poetic activity only discloses what has been kept silent or hidden by subordinating it to his own speech, the male poet replicates feminine figures' subjection to the silences imposed by a masculine discourse.

In this connection, however, we may emphasize that, as we have seen with particular regard to the Parcae, in c. 64 it is precisely "song" that is ignored. Although we might imagine the poet feeling some superiority to the wedding guests, whose ignorance of the Parcae's song serves to symbolize the human world's self-destructive behavior, there is also the basic fact that song, whether the Parcae's or the poet's, goes unheeded. Thus the poet ends c. 64 with stringent criticism of human history. Although what Catullus manages to say aloud about the Parcae and, as we are about to see, about Ariadne has been recovered from silence, it seems that to silence it must return. Even as he appropriates women's voices, then, Catullus draws attention to the sort of silence that constitutes part of how the feminine is figured relative to traditional, more masculine discourse as well as to the natural silence that awaits.

Ariadne on the Shore

C. 64's most powerful image of the silence that applies to feminized figures is Ariadne as she has been abandoned on the shore. Paradoxically, Ariadne is heard into being, becoming a being-in-language, in a way that immediately suggests the limits imposed on her existence in discourse. Since she is placed on the shore, like Catullus himself in c. 101, Ariadne's expressions are saved from disappearing into "wind and running water" only technically and in a way that can have no meaning for her. She is heard only by virtue of Catullus's poem; since the poem is in a natural way unavailable to its characters, Ariadne herself would seem not to experience any break in the surrounding silence. From this perspective, the poet's representation of her, what we may call his hearing of her, as well as the reader's hearing of her in turn are exceptions that serve to emphasize how her utterance is, as a rule, indeed met by silence.

C. 64's focus on Ariadne thus emphasizes what we have seen already is a sort of paradox about personal experience: meaningful in emotional terms, personal experience is made meaningless or, perhaps

more precisely, insignificant in the context of prevailing discourse. The possibility that what she says may be meaningful for the poet or the reader can provide Ariadne no consolation whatsoever; she is not privy to how her speech has been, as it were, recovered from mortalizing silence and given immortality in culture by Catullus's poem. From her own perspective, she is and remains stranded by the narrow constraints of traditional fiction.²² Although in the event her curse takes its effect, so far as she may know and so far as the poem relates her story the curse and all the rest of her speech goes unheard. Ariadne's signs are thus largely insignificant. Since in ways Ariadne recalls Catullus himself in certain poems, we may wonder about how she figures the poet's own experience in discourse, the relationship between utterance and meaningless silence, and what it means to be a being-in-language when language is defined by silence.

ARIADNE'S EXPOSURE AS AN IMAGE OF FEMININE SUBORDINATION IN MASCULINE DISCOURSE

In the ekphrastic narrative, Ariadne's subjection to silence is emphasized, as we will see, by the noisy arrival of Bacchus and his followers, all of whom provide a dissonant contrast to the deep silence of the island (vv. 251–64). Her subjection is emphasized further by the poem's structure, for Catullus finishes his telling of her story by returning to the image with which he began: her depiction on the coverlet as being stranded on the shore. In the poem's first description of the coverlet, Ariadne is "*watching* on the flowing-sounding shore of Dia, [and] sees Theseus *as he recedes* in his swift ship, bearing indomitable fury in her heart" (vv. 52–54: *fluentisomo prospectans litore Diae / Thesea cedentem celeri cum classe tuetur / indomitos in corde gerens Ariadna furores*). At the end, she is, again, "*gloomily watching* the ship *recede* / [and,] wounded, turn[ing] many-threaded cares in her heart" (vv. 249–50: *prospectans cedentem maesta carinam / multiplices animo uoluebat saucia curas*). (Precise verbal parallels between the two passages have been italicized in the translation and set in regular type in the Latin.) By fixing her physical attitude of watching what recedes, the parallels serve to foreground certain changes, both in the object of her attention—from Theseus himself to his ship, a change that would seem to represent increasing distance—and, more importantly, in her emotions. Although the lines describing Ariadne's emotions differ in word choice, they are identical in structure: adjective modifying the direct object accusative (*indomitos*, *multiplices*), adverbial phrase showing site of emotion (*in corde*, *animo*),

a verb form describing her emotional "action" (*gerens, uoluebat*), a feminine nominative singular (*Ariadna* herself, *saucia*), and finally the direct object accusative (*furores, curas*). Even as the words bring their own special meanings, the identical structures emphasize that her depiction at both moments is, indeed, "the same image."²³

Clearly the image haunted Catullus: Ariadne on the shore or—here English may, for once, outpace the Latin in evocation—"strand," stricken at heart and buffeted from without by the wind and the sound of the breakers, staring at the already-distant ship. Distance and socio-cultural silence are both swiftly deepened. Ariadne's separation from a speech community is emphasized by her vivid "watching" or "looking": the verb is repeated, extra attention is drawn to her eyes, and Catullus marks the moment's importance with an interjection: "from a great distance, from the seaweed, with gloomy little eyes, like a stone statue of a bacchant, *she looks for him, oh alas! she looks for him*" (vv. 60–62: *quem procul ex alga maestis Minois ocellis / saxea ut effigies bacchantis, prospicit, eheu, / prospicit*). We will see later how Ariadne's description as a "statue of a bacchant" is picked up and changed by the arrival of Bacchus himself (vv. 251–64).

In the meantime we may suspect that the scene not only haunted Catullus but troubled him. He indicates his sympathy in language that, however conventional, recalls his own sincere admission of anxious despair over his brother's death. Ariadne's "watching" is closely linked to her "being tossed about by great waves of concern" (v. 62: *magnis curarum fluctuat undis*), in language that recalls Catullus's description of his own turmoil in c. 68(a) (v. 13: *quis merse fortunae fluctibus ipse*). It may be that Catullus wishes his reader here to feel as uncomfortable as he himself has felt and in that light depicts Ariadne stripping naked, exposing herself to the buffeting winds (vv. 63–67). Although Ariadne is in a way thus also naked before the reader, I would not say that Catullus's purpose here is prurient. Instead Ariadne's nakedness is a literalization and intensification of her more metaphorical "exposure" to the elements, which in turn signifies her abandonment by the masculine forces that have variously beget and beset her but no longer desire her. Heard and in a way seen by the narrator and by readers of the poem, Ariadne goes unheard—and is strictly insignificant—to other characters in the poem.

This reading of Ariadne's exposure may be strengthened by contrast to how Thetis, who is likewise seen naked, affects Peleus. Like the other nymphs at that moment, Thetis "emerges, naked, from the shining water as far as her breasts" and "at that moment Peleus is inflamed with

love for her" (v. 17–18: *nudato corpore Nymphas / nutricum tenus exstantes e gurgite cano*, and v. 20: *tum Thetidis Peleus incensus fertur amore*, respectively). By contrast, it is striking that Ariadne's breasts are "milky," even "full of milk" (v. 65: *lactentis . . . papillas*). Thomson suggests that "giving milk" would be *lactantis*, while *lactentis* in his view is "a conventional epithet, merely indicating external shape."²⁴ Likewise I doubt that we are expected to imagine Ariadne pregnant by Theseus and, as it were, lactating proleptically as if in anticipation of nursing their infant child.

But there are at least three reasons for taking the description somewhat more literally as indicating milky color rather than that her breasts seem to be of a certain "external shape" (perhaps because they are full of milk).²⁵ First, attention to color would be in line with the color contrasts discussed earlier as well as the Greco-Roman ideal of skin not tanned by the sun. Second, despite the contrast between how the nymphs' and Ariadne's breasts are received—the former as an incitement to positive love, the latter not at all—they are described with similar peculiarity. The nymphs' are referred to as *nutricum* (in the genitive governed by *tenus*, "as far as"), literally "nurses" and only figuratively "breasts," a usage in Latin unique to this passage. It takes no special pleading to translate *nutricum* as "breasts" (as Thomson says, it "must be accepted"), but still we may note that the womanhood or femininity of both the nymphs and Ariadne is specially emblemized by their breasts as they are suitable for nursing. Thetis thus appears to Peleus as one beautifully suited to motherhood (we may note, again, that the Parcae's wedding song focuses on their offspring), and Ariadne is depicted as, if anything, even more nubile, since not only her breasts but her body as a whole is visible. The profound difference between them, of course, is that, where Peleus is love struck by Thetis and a household is founded between them, Theseus, evidently only lustful, is unscrupulous—he did not hesitate to promise marriage—and in the event two households are destroyed.²⁶

In this connection, third, it is also striking that in the same passage Ariadne is—for the first of only two times in the poem—referred to as "daughter of Minos," *Minois* (v. 60). The name *Ariadna* could have occupied the same position but, if the rest of the line were unchanged, only with unacceptable hiatus with *ocellis*. Still, I think that the term *Minois* is motivated here by more than meter alone. By being referred to as "daughter of Minos," Ariadne is ironically identified as continuing the household she has not only left but, prior to leaving, helped to destroy. She acknowledges this situation herself in vv. 180–81. Of course, we are

also quietly encouraged to recall that the household's destruction is in part a consequence of Ariadne's mother's, Pasiphaë's, perverse sexual appetite and therefore contingent on the fact of her half-brother, the Minotaur. Deviant mother and monstrous son served rather more expressly than Ariadne to represent that household's downfall in terms of unacceptable desire for unacceptable bodies. Pasiphaë's evident sexual desire for a bull is matched by what would seem to be the Minotaur's more literal appetite for human children. Both desires are destructive to families; in different ways, both desires cause the death of children.

In a different way, however, Ariadne herself also aids in the death of a child, the Minotaur, precisely because of her own (unacceptable? misplaced?) desire for Theseus. It seems that Ariadne is viewed negatively in this connection. On this reading, the excessive, even bizarre exposure of her breasts represents how her readiness for motherhood has proved directly inimical to her daughterhood. What should be a routine, even ritualistic transfer to a household other than her father's has gone awry as a result of her own desire and attempt at agency. Ariadne's status as potential mother is emphasized by what we are quietly led to understand, since she is completely naked, is the exposure of her pubic region. This seems confirmed by the second appearance in the poem of the patronymic *Minois*, when the "grief" (*luctum*) that Theseus feels upon "entering the house funereal from his father's death" matches "the grief he imposed upon the daughter of Minos due to his unmindful heart" (vv. 246–47: *funesta domus ingressus tecta paterna / morte*; and vv. 246–48: *qualem Minoidi luctum / obtulerat mente immemori, talem ipse recepit*, respectively). Here, again, is a vulnerability particular to one's position in family life: Ariadne is referred to as "daughter of Minos" precisely when her feeling of despair must be deepened because of both her distance from her father's household and her hand in its destruction. The fact that Theseus is subject to a similar situation would, if Ariadne knew about it, presumably offer her little consolation.

"COMPELLED USELESSLY" TO SPEAK: INEFFICACY OF
UTTERANCE IN THE CONTEXT OF SILENCE

Having been used and abandoned by a man, Ariadne is, as we have seen, framed at her most pathetic in terms that nevertheless center around her service to men in various capacities as a woman: mother, daughter, and more. She is thus indeed "feminized" by the discourse. The effects are so deep and pervasive that in her own lament she wonders—we might say: she is made to wonder—whether she might

still contribute to Theseus's household, if not as an honored wife, then as a humbler servant: "I could be serving you in sweet labor, softening your shining feet with clear liquids or arranging your bed with a purple coverlet" (vv. 161–63: *tibi iucundo famularer serua labore, / candida permulcens liquidis uestigia lymphis, / purpureae tuum consternens ueste cubile*). We should emphasize that Ariadne imagines herself making Theseus's bed with a "coverlet" (*ueste*) just as—as she does not know as a poetic fact but may have as a feeling of constraint—she has been made on a "coverlet," *uestis*, on another bed. As Ariadne thus unwittingly repeats the condition of her own poeticization by the male poet, it is as if utterance cannot but replicate the speaker's subjection to silence.

As Ariadne pursues this pathetic fantasy further, she imagines herself increasingly intimate with Theseus in ways that emphasize the utility of her body over her capacity for utterance and that suggest how her being-in-language is correspondingly diminished. She could be servant in general, bathing girl in particular, or attend him in the bedroom above all.²⁷ Clearly these fantasies are desperate. In the context of a poetics of silence, I would say that they also suggest fairly precisely the tendency of Ariadne's speech toward silence. Ironically, her own speech at this moment, so fluent and forceful, draws attention to how her capacity for language will be unnecessary and in any case blocked in the future: she imagines herself subject to a sexualized silence. That this is, in her view, perhaps her best possible future is a measure of her desperation indeed.

As if in anticipation of the actual future, the inevitable natural silence of death, even these harrowed utterances are met by silence. Ariadne herself recognizes this in a bitter rhetorical question: "But why am I—'made to stand apart from myself' by evil—complaining in vain to the ignorant breezes, which, without senses, are able neither to hear voices uttered nor to answer?" (vv. 164–66: *sed quid ego ignaris nequiquam conqueror auris, / exsternata malo, quae nullis sensibus auctae / nec missas audire queunt nec reddere uoces?*).²⁸ We discuss the surrounding soundscape further in the next section. Here I note that a particularly discomfiting aspect of Ariadne's situation is how her awareness and compelling representation of it help her not at all. Since she serves here as an archetypal image of how silence affects feminized figures, indeed of how silence feminizes, we may take her failure as applying more generally.

Moreover, since such feminized figures include Catullus, the inefficacy of her language implies the poet's. The lines just quoted align Ariadne with Catullus as he is made by the death of his brother to

speak "in vain," in his case to silent ash, while standing similarly abandoned on the shore. Making the comparison in reverse, we may wonder whether, as perhaps in Catullus's view, Ariadne must truly have loved Theseus. Like Catullus also in his relation to Lesbia, then, Ariadne may love Theseus still, experiencing the emotion paradoxically as a kind of depersonalizing compulsion: just as Catullus is "compelled to love even more" (72.8: *cogit amare magis*), so is Ariadne "compelled uselessly" (64.197: *cogor inops*). We may say, then, that her awareness of her situation is useless to her; in no way does knowledge or even capacity allow her to act in a meaningful way. Since her primary "action" in the poem, her long lament, is language, in this way she is truly silenced.

Ariadne's Hardly Overheard Lament

It is no wonder that Catullus centered c. 64 around Ariadne, for whom he evidently had great and somewhat conflicted sympathy. She is called into being by language users and likewise heard into being by listeners, all of whose various kinds of access to discourse surpass and constrain her own. In particular she is heard as a "she" indeed and thus for all practical purposes silenced as a being-in-language. An ordinary coming-of-age would have been constrictive enough, as she was passed effectively from the possession of one masculine figure, her father, to another in the form of her husband; that straightforward passage from presexual to sexual being would have come with its own constraints on participation in different kinds of discourse. (The transfer would have emphasized her new sexuality, or at least her sexualization, frankly if not openly.) The consequences of Ariadne's actual coming-of-age are if anything worse, as the passage she is compelled to attempt is made impossible by extraordinary conditions. Her father's household is marked by sexual perversity and monstrosity especially in regard to children, the former uncontrolled and the latter contained only after the fact and at continually unacceptable cost. Likewise, the man who ought to become her husband does not: instead he kills her half-brother and in a way he is responsible for her death, too. (Of course he also causes his own father's suicide; it was Ariadne's bad luck that Theseus brings only death to her family as well as his own, while the children he saves are all elsewhere.) Most basically, what should have been a propagation of households by union and birth is instead the destruction of households by division and death.

In Ariadne's world there would seem, then, to be no possibility of an ordinary coming-of-age as the children are, almost to a person, sent to their deaths. The fact that Ariadne has the strength to speak at all under such conditions is surely a testament to something, but of what I am not completely sure; her language having been prepared by certain traditions, she can only speak as if the world were other than it is. In this way c. 64 subtly emphasizes the problem of expression, especially but not only for feminized figures, by illustrating how traditional discourse does not correspond to lived experience. What should have been an opportunity for certain positive utterance—an *epithalamium* to match Thetis's and Peleus's, as clearly in the context of the marriage-centered longer poems—requires instead a wholly negative lament that serves to mark its speaker's effective silence. It would not be too much of an exaggeration to say that discourse predestines Ariadne for silence.

But of course, as we have seen, at points in Catullus's poetics of silence the same thing could be said of us all. For Catullus, then, Ariadne emblemizes how natural and awful it is to be called into being only then to be ignored in discourse. In my view this is not only appropriation of a woman's imagined intersubjective experience but also a true fellow feeling on Catullus's part, what I have called an intersubjective ventriloquism. She is as emotionally expressive, and as unheeded, in her abandonment as he was in his bereavement. Precisely, then, just as Catullus's brother appears most vividly, pallidly, as a "small, pale *foot* [that] the flowing wave *laps*," so is Ariadne exposed, as we have seen, with her clothing "*lapped* by the rivers of salt at her *feet*."²⁹ Catullus's brother was subject to the accidental constraint of a traditional genre; as we saw, this was intolerable to the poet, who could not but feel it a constraint on his own capacity for expression, indeed his being-in-language.

Ariadne serves to show how feminized figures, especially but not only women, are subject to such constraints more consequentially. Catullus may feel that his speech at the shore is "in vain," but still he speaks as a male representative of a household and with conscious awareness of his manipulation of poetic tradition. Ariadne's speech is more profoundly defamiliarizing and ineffectual, and she herself is completely isolated and exposed. In being stripped so bare, in being defined by the unresponsiveness of various men to her utterance (increasingly distant Theseus, the father she abandoned as did, in a different way, her mother, the [inarticulate?] half-brother whose death she helped to cause), she is simultaneously called into being, an extremely limited being-in-language, and silenced.

WHO HEARS ARIADNE'S LAMENT, AND HOW THEY DO NOT

As she is depicted in c. 64, Ariadne serves to illustrate how feminized figures are in a way subject to powerful fictionalization and therefore constrained by discursive traditions. In this way she represents, to a greater or lesser degree, all language users. Within the confines of discourse, it must be a rare language user indeed who is completely "real" or who has solved the problem of expression such that he or she utters, and is uttered, as he or she desires. Rather more must see their utterance subject to profoundly limiting silence, as a result of which their desires or wills are rendered at least irrelevant if not effectively nonexistent. Catullus's depiction of Ariadne may thus be read as modeling a sort of worst-case scenario in the relationship between being-in-language and silence.

As we have seen, Ariadne is vividly present to the poet as well as to the poem's readers, but in the world of the poem hardly anyone hears her. Catullus hears her, but he responds perhaps more to the haunting image of her abandonment on the shore than to what we might call her person, the will or subjectivity behind her words. She is also heard by Jupiter; as we will see, however, although his response to her is more audible, it is nonetheless incomprehensible: he rolls thunder, and there are consequences to his response from which she is ironically kept ignorant (vv. 204–6). Finally, Ariadne is discovered by Bacchus and his followers, but as the poem imagines it that discovery is separate from her situation on the shore and therefore from her utterance; we might think of it as occupying a separate panel on the coverlet, while in any case it seems to be self-contained (vv. 251–64).

All of these "responses" suggest that the silence that afflicts Ariadne is of a special type and force, distinct from the silences affecting even the Parcae or other characters. We notice, for example, that, although the wedding guests seem to admire the coverlet's depictions, unlike the narrator they do not seem to hear Ariadne and may not even notice her as a figure separable from the coverlet in general, much less one that is so foregrounded as she is for readers of the poem. Wrapping up the ekphrasis, Catullus writes that "the Thessalian youth had its fill of desirously regarding the depictions" (vv. 267–68: *quae* [referring to *talibus figuris*, v. 265] *postquam cupide spectando Thessala pubes / expleta est*). This would seem to link the youth to a central theme of the story, "desire," in that their regard is "desirous," *cupide*. In this way they may be likened to Ariadne, who "looked upon [Theseus] with desirous gaze" (v. 86:

hunc . . . cupido conspexit lumine), and so might be thought to sympathize with her feeling more deeply.³⁰ The figure of Ariadne on the coverlet, the haunted narrator, and the narrated characters would thus converge around a shared feeling of desire as well as its symbolization in the sense of sight.

But this cannot be pushed much further. For there is a difference: whereas, as we have seen, Ariadne is both depicted on the coverlet and narrated by the poet as "looking for" (*prospicere*) Theseus continuously, the characters in the main story as such are, again, able to have their fill of "regarding" (*spectando*). Her action, as it is strictly repeated by the poem, marks her as truly passive, while their action shows that they have the sort of freedom that passes for agency, indeed, even if in this context it is revealed as rather a relative lack of certain constraints. In contrast to Ariadne, who looks with all her heart (and that always broken) as if forward (*pro-spicere*) to being made whole but is of course destroyed, the wedding guests may limit their own looking, however intense (*spectare*), without evident negative consequence.

In terms of our interest in silence, the guests also only "look": unlike the narrator or the reader, they do not "hear." Although Catullus leaves ambiguous whether the guests know Ariadne's story as he relates it to us, at the least it is clear that they do not "fill themselves by listening." There is no *audiendo*, "hearing," to match their *spectando*, "looking," and if they are affected by the coverlet's depiction of Ariadne's fate, it would seem to be somewhat unconsciously and, again, without consequence.³¹ As spectators only, the wedding guests serve to emphasize, by enforcing, the human and inhuman silences that surround Ariadne's lament. Ariadne is ignored by Theseus and unheard by everyone except the poet and the distant king of the gods. Since both Catullus and Jupiter represent a different kind or higher order of being than Ariadne, their sympathy is unknowable to her. In a related way, Ariadne is silenced as well at this highest level of the poem's narrative as the characters-as-spectators constrain even the narrator's version of the story by their evident ignorance. Catullus's story about Ariadne, resolutely speechy, itself tends toward silence as the other characters' attention redirects the poem's readers to the wedding of Thetis and Peleus. We are reminded that Ariadne is strictly secondary and, in the context of that main story, not a real figure anyway but a picture on a tapestry. Relative to the primary reality of the wedding guests, she is frozen in place, and any speech on her part sounds only in Catullus's poetic imagination.

"COMPELLED USELESSLY," AGAIN: WHAT RESPONSE
TO SILENCE?

In c. 64, then, Ariadne is produced as a feminized figure in part by the subordination of her utterance to that of a masculine narrator. In a structure we have seen employed in several poems, the poet's own utterance depends on, and comes out of, the silence of another potential subjectivity—in the context of ancient discourse, this is virtually a definition of "feminization." Since such feminization is a function not of physical fact but of discursive practice, it applies fairly broadly. As Ariadne's story is displaced and limited, we may therefore feel the narrator's regret, and not a little bit his fear, for such disregard would seem to threaten all beings-in-language. The fact of our subordination to discourse, the tendency of our utterance toward silence, is hard to accept with anything like poetic tranquility, much less the Epicurean equanimity that might be suggested by c. 64's echoes of Catullus's contemporary Lucretius.³² And yet there is a kind of power, creative if not recuperative, to be found in responding to the silence that awaits and surrounds. In Catullus this leads, as I have hoped to show all throughout this study, to a poetics of silence.

We may now focus on an analogue of that poetics in Ariadne's responses to the silence that surrounds her. After descending into pathetic fantasy about her future with Theseus, Ariadne calls herself back from that degrading brink by acknowledging how her speech is met by silence. As she puts it, only the "ignorant breezes" are there, and they are precisely "able neither to hear voices uttered nor to answer" (v. 164: *ignaris . . . auris*, and v. 166: *nec missas audire queunt nec reddere uoces*, respectively).³³ To the breezes we may add the breakers, whose slow, regular crash is suggested by v. 67, where they lap at Ariadne's discarded clothing as if mutely to emphasize her increasing distance from culture that consists ideally of utterance and response (*ipsius ante pedes fluctus salis alludebant*). We should note that none of these natural sounds is utterance. As a result, their constitution of the soundscape emphasizes the absence of human voices. What one feels should be the acoustic background to conversation has become the foreground, and with that inversion sociocultural and natural meaning becomes impossible. Ariadne echoes Catullus's awareness of the silence that awaits when she draws the conclusion that her "complaint" is, as the soundscape's only utterance, "in vain." Like him, she wonders bitterly at the

futility of giving her feelings voice (v. 164 again: *quid ego ignaris nequiquam conqueror auris*).

And yet she cannot stop talking. As she says, she is "compelled uselessly" (v. 197: *cogor inops*), and her speech continues for thirty-five more lines. Nor does she seem to stop hoping that what she says will have some effect. The fact that her hopes range widely, even wildly, emphasizes her general desperation as well as the more particular feeling that she is going unheard. In this she is, again, remarkably like Catullus, who as we have seen in certain poems is torn between the ultimate inefficacy of utterance against silence and the feeling that utterance is all he or anyone may have or do. This allows Catullus great psychological acuity. Ariadne, bereft of two ruined households and stripped bare, limited, destroyed at the very moment of being identified, keeps talking so that she does not disappear completely. Evidently she has a great capacity for speech, and the situation provides a sort of compulsive inspiration. In a way her outpoured lament is like the result of Catullus's transformation, because of his own "abandonment" in the context of his brother's death, into a sort of Philomela (c. 68[a]). Like her poet, Ariadne has found in great constraint a sort of freedom of speech. (We will see in the next section how her speech, exactly like Catullus's projected poetry [68(a).12], is "gloomy" [64.202].) But of course, the same constraints diminish agency and therefore meaning, insofar as the remaining speaker must speak if there is to be any utterance at all. In Ariadne's case this would seem to apply more completely. She is eventually rescued by Bacchus, but if anything this emphasizes her isolation away from meaningful conversation. As we will see, Bacchus's arrival is noisy in ways that are nonlinguistic, and there is no question of him or his followers directly responding to her lament.

Thus Ariadne, far more than Catullus, is always alone, always effectively silenced. Paradoxically, she is most fully a human being, exercising her capacity to speak most fully, at the very moment of being abandoned to a soundscape that is both unhearing and inarticulate and therefore precisely dehumanizing. Ariadne herself puts a very fine point on this situation. The particular contrast between her utterance and the silence with which it is met is suggestive of the more general situation: "there is no means for flight, no hope: all is deaf and dumb, all is deserted, all shows death" (vv. 186–87: *nulla fugae ratio, nulla spes: omnia muta, / omnia sunt deserta, ostentant omnia letum*). *Omnia muta* means literally "all things are mute," but the adjective *mutus*, like many in Latin, covers both the active and the passive effects of its implied ver-

bal action: both "everything does not speak" and "everything does not hear."³⁴ The phrase's ambiguity, its totalizing scope, is emphasized by its centrality to Ariadne's sentence: it seems positioned to summarize the balanced phrases on either side, with "all is deaf and dumb" neatly and powerfully symbolizing how there is no response (to utterance, to human signification) and only one way out (from life into death). At the same time, the lines deftly suggest the development of Ariadne's thinking as she proceeds from (denying) the concrete, "flight," through generalizing ("all") the reasons for its impossibility, to (emphasizing) the abstract, "death," which must at this moment seem very real.³⁵ Hearing nothing but inchoate noise, and with her own utterances in particular going unanswered, Ariadne speaks with a certain sense-perceptual precision when she says that death is not "spoken" but "shown" (as the object of *ostentant*). In this inhuman soundscape, there is more meaning, albeit distressing meaning, in sights than in sounds. Ariadne's formulation thus suggests her own perception of the diminished meaningfulness, and the dwindling value, of speech.

ARIADNE'S "LOVERLY COMPLAINTS"

In c. 64, Ariadne is made to attempt a sort of time-honored solution to the problem of expression in isolation: to raise one's voice ever further. In the context of unmeaningful silence of such intensity as to evoke the natural, absolute silence of death, Ariadne draws most deeply on herself to call out at her most forceful, with clearest purpose and, we may imagine, highest volume. She has been "pouring her voice out from her gloomy heart" (v. 202: *has . . . maesto profudit pectore uoces*). Her lament was introduced in similar language: "she, infuriated in her burning heart, often poured out from her deepest breast clear-sounding voice" (vv. 124–25: *saepe illam perhibent ardenti corde furemtem / clarisonas imo fudisse e pectore uoces*). Her strength of speech here is, to Catullus, enough for it to be aligned with the Parcae's, whose collective voice is also described as "clear-sounding" (v. 320: *clarisona*). "Gloom" would seem to come somewhat later, as the unmeaningfulness of surrounding silence overtakes her. In this way the sense of power in her speech does not contradict the fact that her speech has also seemed pathetic, a matter—as we saw her recognize—of tearful and frustratingly conventional "loverly complaints" (v. 195: *querellae*): "she, gloomy, said these things as her last complaints, summoning up cold little sobs from her dewy mouth" (vv. 130–31: *haec extremis maestam dixisse querellis, / frigidulos udo singultus ore cientem*).

Not so at the moment currently in question, when Ariadne speaks for the last and most forceful time (vv. 188–201). She commands the Furies: "hither, come hither, and hear my loverly complaints, / which I, alas wretched I, from my deepest marrows / am compelled, helplessly, to carry out, burning, blind with mindless fury" (vv. 195–97: *huc huc aduentate, meas audite querellas, / quas ego, uae miserae, imis proferre medullis / cogor inops, ardens, amenti caeca furore*). Although she acknowledges that what she utters are still "loverly complaints" (*querellas*; v. 195), it is now with a greater sense of self-possession made possible by her deepening awareness of the soundscape and so of the relationship between her utterance and the surrounding silence. As she says clearly, she will not give in to that silence as it stands for death (vv. 188–89) before she, "who [has] been betrayed, demands just vengeance from the gods and extracts by prayer, in [her] final hour, a promise from the heavenly ones" (vv. 190–91: *iustam a diuis exposcam prodita multam / caelestumque fidem postrema comprecser hora*).

Ariadne's purposefulness is clear, and she even manages a sort of power: she "demands" and "extracts by prayer." Even when she describes her last words in a way that follows the narrator's conventional description, albeit with greater vividness, as "carried out of her deepest marrows" (v. 196: *imis proferre medullis*), it is I think with a sense of her agency having been enhanced by constraint. The conventionality of the emotional language—"burning, blind with mindless fury" (v. 197: *ardens, amenti caeca furore*)—should not be thought to lessen its impact; in this connection we might recall Catullus's attempt in c. 101 to infuse funerary ritual with personal feeling.³⁶

In other words, even if the conventional is not personally meaningful, the speaker's recognition that the conventional is all there is must lend such expression real pathos. In a manner that parallels her turn from fantasy to bitter precision, in this passage Ariadne may resign herself to death, indeed, but not before taking a final stand in speech to assert that what she says is true because it has come from deepest within. It is as if the very fact of language, or at least of last words, must be enough to redeem her agency and identity. Isolated on the shore, she nevertheless asserts her capacity to take part in conversation. The Furies are thus commanded to "come hither, and hear," the combination suggesting a sort of face-to-face conversation (a suggestion strengthened by the description of the Furies' foreheads, characteristic but also intimate) in which Ariadne is grandly their equal or even their superior. Part of her

strength comes from the fact that she is, as she says, "blind," unseeing in her anger and so trusting more to hearing and to speech.

From this perspective, the speech that comes from deepest within is meaningful and trustworthy in ways that go beyond conventional limits on expression. "Since my complaints have been born true, from deep in my breast" (v. 198: *quae quoniam uerae nascuntur pectore ab imo*), in Ariadne's view the Furies are sure not to be misled and should know that the cause is just. For the character this is a far cry indeed from "cold little sobs" and complaints uttered "in vain to ignorant breezes." Ariadne's relationship to the soundscape has changed. She grows more voluble, articulate, and forceful as she seems to accept the silence that surrounds and, therefore, her role as solitary representative of the human capacity for speech. This may represent a change for the narrator as well. There is an argument to be made that, if anyone should fear the Furies' vengeance, it would be Ariadne herself for having brought death to members of her family, in a way much more directly than hated Theseus. Her desired transformation of the Furies' traditional role would thus represent a sort of change in metaphysics. In this way Ariadne's lament would suggest how Catullus attends to the poetic possibilities of utterance even in the face of overwhelming silence. Even when such utterance is compelled lest there be only silence—the speaker is "compelled uselessly" (*cogor inops*)—still it may generate, if not meaning as such, then great and regretful fellow feeling.

Two Unmeaningful Responses to Ariadne's Lament

Depending on the soundscape, we are heard into being in different ways. In c. 64, however, the general situation seems to be that one is not heard in ways that would do justice to one's intended meanings or even correspond to one's desires. In this way desire as it relates to language, perhaps the precondition of agency or even human being in antiquity, is overmatched by silence. We may therefore conclude our discussion of c. 64 by placing the silence imposed on Ariadne in the context of two potentially "conversational" moments when utterance might result, as desired, in the communication of meaning but does not. We have already discussed the first, the silence greeting the Parcae's song. I revisit that silence briefly in this connection before turning to the second, the reception of Ariadne's utterance by the arrival of Bacchus and his train

of noisy followers. At both of these moments, language is at risk of yielding to mere "sound." At the second moment in particular, sound ramifies in ways that would seem to impose severe limits on language and being-in-language.

As we have seen, the silence greeting the Parcae's song is more consequential in what we might call historical terms: they accurately predict the coming of Achilles and the Trojan War, but their prediction is disregarded. Despite the Parcae's plurality, this silence is one of an individual voice. In contrast to how, for example, the feminine collective of the Muses may utter not only what will be, what is, and what has been, but also what *seems* to belong to any of those categories, the Parcae speak only what is certain of realization. Evidently lacking the Muses' capacity for fictionalization, the Parcae sing truthfully but, in the context of Catullus's interest in personal expression, in ways that must not represent any individual or personal desire. We might say that the Parcae's commitment to veridical discourse is emphasized by their collectivity: they sing as one.

Since "song" and "poem" overlap, c. 64 thus emphasizes what is, for the narrator, a frightfully consequential lack of attention to the meaning of poetic utterance. What hope has the human poet of being heard correctly or meaningfully when songs from singers such as the Parcae have gone unheeded? In this way c. 64 would seem to go beyond the metapoetic issues raised in such poems as cc. 16 and 22 by suggesting that the poet, like any speaker, is indeed at risk of becoming a feminized figure. Utterance must tend to be met by silence, here not mainly the natural silence of death but, in a way worse because more arbitrary, the sociocultural silences that characterize a masculine tradition of discourse. This unmeaningfulness would seem to be worse also because it is caused by those beings whose responses might make one's utterance meaningful indeed.

In her roles as exemplar of feminization by silence and as analogue for Catullus as poet, Ariadne serves to figure this situation vividly. In one sense, her situation is partly comparable to the Parcae's, for her lament includes discussion of the future. But already here there is contrast, in that Ariadne's "prediction" is really an expression of desire, which the Parcae, as a rule, do not seem to feel or express. Ariadne curses Theseus and the curse comes true. As a result, of all the characters in the poem it is she whose speech is most perlocutionary: she speaks and what she (finally) wishes for comes true. One great irony is that Ariadne speaks so powerfully only in the context of a silence

that isolates her completely from ordinary conversation. Her utterance has a direct effect but only via channels that are nonhuman and therefore strictly unmeaningful. Ariadne is powerful insofar as she has been dehumanized. Another irony is that she is not positioned to know whether her utterance has been effectual. In a word, then, we may say that Ariadne speaks only after she has been silenced. By then of course it is too late for her. Only the poet benefits, and so we are back to the sort of situation in which Catullus overhears and says aloud what otherwise might have gone completely unheard.

FEMINIZATION BY MASCULINE FIGURES, INCLUDING
MALE POETS

In this way c. 64 draws attention to how our being-in-language tends to silence by way of fictionalization in discourse. In the context of discursive traditions and other cultural practices emphasizing the masculine, silence by fictionalization is the condition of feminized figures especially. Such a feminized figure may be heard only insofar as a traditionally masculine discourse makes it possible. Ariadne's utterance is marked as profoundest self-expression, and in the event it is consequential, but all of this is thanks to Catullus. For that matter, in a different way Ariadne's opportunity to speak is also due to Theseus. By at least these two masculine figures, Ariadne herself is positioned in such a way that, strictly speaking, she cannot be heard. Her utterance thus refers back to the silence imposed on her not only by circumstance but also by her entrance into, her total dependence on, Catullus's poetry.

We may go further and say that, in particular, Ariadne is not truly overheard but only represented as speaking in an artistic fiction. Although this is true of every speaker in c. 64, it applies to her perhaps most powerfully in that she is the most prominent occupant of what we might call the most "fictional" of the poem's fictions, the ekphrasis. From this perspective, it is meaningful to distinguish among the narrator, whose existence is guaranteed by, and guarantees in turn, the fact of the poem; characters like the Parcae, who exist in the story told by the poem directly and whose certainty underwrites the reality of other characters positioned similarly; and all the characters in Ariadne's story, including Theseus and his family. Those last are images on a visual work of art, or the narrator's recollections of a story suggested by that artwork. As a result their "utterances" as well as their "silences" are in fact matters of poetic convention.

In the context of Catullus's poetics of silence, however, such heavily

fictionalized figures serve to represent the situation in which all language users find themselves. Again, Ariadne serves as a vivid example. As a woven figure, she represents an intensification or literalization of how poetic tradition has fictionalized at least since Homer. We may briefly consider Homer's Penelope. She is defined by Odysseus's absence and to a lesser degree by Telemachus's coming-of-age. Her control over the household is a specious fiction, which she herself symbolizes via continual, strictly unproductive weaving and unweaving. In this way she cannot but participate in her own continual subordination, even literal domestication, "uttering" in a way that emphasizes her "silence" in real terms. Penelope's experience of the problem of expression is total. Even her son, whose status in the household is precarious indeed, can tell her to keep quiet and return to her chambers (*Od.* 1.356–64): even an immature boy can reinforce a grown woman's silence.

Relative to Penelope's, Ariadne's situation in c. 64 is a step further. Abandoned not by a husband but by an illicit lover, bereft of any trappings of traditional households, Ariadne does not deceptively, fruitlessly weave but is herself actually woven.³⁷ Harkening back to perhaps the poetic tradition's archetypal feminized figure, she exemplifies how language users are reduced, ironically by virtue of their very language use, to representations of their subjection as their utterance always reflects the limiting conventions of discourse and cultural practice. In this context it is not coincidental but awfully meaningful indeed that a "fictional" character like Ariadne and a "real" person like Catullus are subjected to similar silences. Abandoned by their loved ones on the shore, they may speak only uselessly. The surrounding sounds hardly count as responses to their utterance and serve not to break but to deepen their experiences of silence.

THE SPEAKER'S SILENCE IN THE CONTEXT OF SOUNDS OTHER THAN SPEECH

In final consideration of how Ariadne vividly figures this important aspect of Catullus's poetics of silence, then, we may note two other aspects of her situation in c. 64. Both involve silence as the absence of (human) utterance and/or the presence of sounds whose meanings are unusual. First, Ariadne's command to the Furies—"hither, come hither and hear my lovely complaints" (v. 195: *huc huc aduentate meas audite querellas*)—is answered audibly indeed but not in speech. Instead of transforming the prevailing soundscape, the peculiar audibility of the

answer rather serves to emphasize how Ariadne is surrounded by the absence of utterance, isolated from anything like ordinary human interaction and, instead, subject to dehumanizing forces. "With unconquerable power the ruler of the heavens nodded, / and by that motion the earth and the bristling oceans / trembled, and the world hammered at the glittering stars" (vv. 204–6: *annuit inuicto caelestum numine rector; / quo motu tellus atque horrida contremuerunt / aequora concussitque micantia sidera mundus*). Jupiter's thunderous nod, a conventional (epic) sign of his approval and force of will, shakes the earth, the seas, and the stars: the whole world resounds.

From Ariadne's perspective, however, this sound is not necessarily intelligible as a response. As we will see in c. 63, discussed in chapter 7, Catullus is perfectly capable of having landscapes "echo back" vocal sounds as such. By contrast, here Ariadne's utterance is met with noise, with what is effectively silence. The description makes clear that this level of sound intersects with silence at the point where each becomes sublime, strictly beyond human comprehension. That these sounds are specifically portentous in the poet's narrative does not make them necessarily intelligible as such to his characters. Theseus's punishment requires his ignorance—it is not clear whether the thunder rolls to him at his increasing distance, but if so he must not "understand" it. More importantly, we are given to hear nothing more of Ariadne until she is, again, envisioned as a figure fixed in place and staring, not listening. Her utterance has not changed her situation materially, such that she is fixed in permanent silence on the shore.

The second source of unmeaningful sounds that render Ariadne's own utterance unmeaningful is her rescue by Bacchus and his train. As the poem depicts the coverlet, this is always deferred, such that again Ariadne is pathetically unaware of this, her future; it exists only in the poetic imagination. This future moment is awash in exotic and alienating sound, as well as strange sights and movements (vv. 254–64):

With drink-addled minds they maddened about,
 "Euhoe!" the bacchants, "Euhoe!" nodding their heads. 255
 Some of them shook the *thyrsi* with their pine-cone tips,
 some tossed about the pieces from a dismembered bull,
 some girded themselves with twisted serpents,
 some of them thronged about mysterious *orgia* in wicker boxes,
orgia that the uninitiated desire in vain to hear about; 260
 others beat on drums with their upraised palms,

or summoned thin ringings with hammered bronze;
for many, horns blew out raucous-sounding booms
and the barbaric flute shrieked in hair-raising song.

alacres passim lymphata mente furebant
euhoe bacchantes, euhoe capita inflectentes. 255
harum pars tecta quatiebant cuspidē thyrsos,
pars e diuolso iactabant membra iuuenco,
pars sese tortis serpentibus incingebant,
pars obscura cauis celebrabant orgia cistis,
orgia quae frustra cupiunt audire profani; 260
plangebant aliae proceris tympana palmis,
aut tereti tenuis tinnitus aere ciebant;
multis raucisonos efflabant cornua bombos
barbaraque horribili stridebat tibia cantu.

The sound of the Latin here is unusual and evocative, suggesting the startling effect of the bacchants' sounds: for example, the crisp assonance of *tereti tenuis tinnitus*, the wide-open swallow of *cornua bombos*, the "shrill *i*-sounds in the middle of the line" *barbaraque . . . cantu* "represent[ing] the *timbre* of the instrument."³⁸ We may imagine as well the hiss of the serpents before they were belts, even the agonized roar of the bull while he was being dismembered. Evocative phonology aside, we are also given to hear the dry rustle of woven plant matter (the *thyrsus* and its tip of pine cone, the plaited wicker), the slap of skins (palms, drumheads) and the taut beating of the drums, the flat crash of cymbals ("hammered bronze"), a wash of low, booming drones (from the horns), and piped melodies that wend their exotic way from ears to tingling hairs. All of this is presented against a background of the unfamiliar ritualistic shout, audible but incomprehensible, of the bacchants themselves, "Euhoe!" There could hardly be a more dramatic change from the isolating, out-of-doors silence in which Ariadne had previously found herself, broken only by the wind and the irregular crash of waves. And yet none of this can have any ordinary meaning; it is noise, and as a sort of response to Ariadne's utterance it only reinforces how she has been met by silence.

This noisy silence is particularly alienating. As a rule the sounds here connote activity that is alien or foreign in a way that goes far beyond what even technically accurate representations of the instruments and noises may suggest. For the Romans, these sounds, the instruments that produced them, and the activities of which they formed an essential part suggested unacceptable, even frightening, foreign cultural prac-

tice. Practices like these were never completely naturalized in Latin discourse, and at times the Romans attempted to exclude them forcibly from the city and society.³⁹ Their significance was mysterious, and they were considered disruptive of ordinary civic life. As Thomson observes with regard to c. 63: "Every Roman of C[atullus's] generation must have been familiar with the annual processions of eunuch priests, accompanied by music played to strange percussive rhythms, in honour of Cybele. . . . With or without the help of Marsyas, [Cybele] invented an Eastern style of music and dance, together with its appropriate instruments: tambourines, cymbals, and a kind of flute. For many generations, in the minds of Romans orgiastic music (as they thought of it), as well as unrestrained bodily gestures and comportment, were associated with the service of the cult."⁴⁰

The close association of the exotic instruments, their unusual sounds, and the particular style of music with the unacceptable worship of a bizarrely demanding god is easily transferable to Bacchus. We may therefore infer just such an alienated feeling in the passage at hand. Although Ariadne is of course not literally a Roman, we may imagine these sounds as having something of a similar effect on her as she stands in for Catullus's own experience of alienation from certain cultural practices including discourse and language. To be sure, it is not that the sounds challenge her sense of what it means to worship appropriately in civic terms, although we should, I think, understand the sounds and attendant sights as reinforcing her feeling of having been excluded from two households and indeed all human society. As nonlanguage, unmeaningful noise instead of ordinary utterance in conversation, these sounds constitute a sort of silence that signifies how profoundly Ariadne's world has been changed.

From Ariadne to Attis (and Catullus)

Since the bacchic sounds are, along with Jupiter's thunder, all Ariadne may hear as if in response to her utterance, she cannot but feel that she is heard into being as a being who hardly exists any longer in language. Although the music and thunder are masculine in origin, their divinity and power are such that Ariadne is limited in her access to discourse, feminized, far beyond what ordinary feminine figures experience.⁴¹ With such sounds overwhelming even her loudest cry, there can be no question any longer of articulate speech being meaningful. Since this

is the very definition of language, the silence that surrounds Ariadne, which is a total absence of human utterance, dehumanizes her.

We might say that Ariadne is thus subjected to a particularly labyrinthine silence. In a way no less than her monstrous half-brother, she has been isolated, locked away, from ordinary human contact and conversation. It would not be too much to say that, in a way, she is killed by Theseus by being abandoned to a sociocultural silence so complete that it evokes the natural silence of death. Since Ariadne provides an analogue for the poet, Catullus thus vividly figures his own risk of feminization in discourse: of being fictionalized by conventional expression such that his own personal expression is effectively silenced. The limits of such feminization are explored further in the figure of Attis in c. 63, to which we turn in the next chapter.

7

“Feminized” Voices and Their Silences, Part 2

Cc. 63 and 51

... nothing is left over for me / <of voice in my mouth>

51.7–8: *nihil est super mi* / <*uocis in ore*>

C. 63: Attis on the Shore

The figure of Attis in c. 63 confirms our impression that, in the context of Catullus’s poetics of silence, feminized figures are subjected to an overpowering silence.¹ Like Ariadne in c. 64 and Catullus himself at several points, including c. 51 as discussed later, Attis is heard into being in ways that deviate from his desires and that subordinate his utterances to unmeaningful silence. Like Ariadne, Attis is depicted as virtually disappearing into a background of sounds whose exotic provenance is alienating to the ear. This acoustic alienation serves to symbolize the character’s more consequential disorientation and distance from being-in-language. In Ariadne’s case this feminization is to some degree natural, in that her biological gender strongly conduces to how she is silenced, or even otherwise entered into discourse, by masculine figures. Like Penelope and in a way like Philomela, Ariadne is subjected to a certain silence by virtue of the very poetry, male-authored, that would preserve her abandoned utterance at all.

The similar silence that applies in Attis’s case is perhaps more disturbing to participants in ancient discourse for operating with greater disregard for the person. Attis is figured as alone on the shore; meaningful

utterance is weighed against meaningless sound and found wanting; and we know this since all is overheard and repeated by virtue of the masculine poet's greater capacity to break certain silences including those applying to feminized figures. The silence experienced by Attis is thus above all a matter of positioning relative to discourse, while biological gender is involved only artificially. Attis was originally a man but has achieved a kind of feminized status by castrating himself. This artificial feminization gives Catullus the chance to show off a bit in his poetry, changing personal pronouns and adjectives—which in Latin must match their modified noun in grammatical gender—midstream to attest to Attis's new femininity. In a sense, then, Attis contains two figures who are silenced simultaneously: the "he" who has disappeared by becoming "she," and the "she" who is like Ariadne.

Which of these silences more closely models, in Catullus's view, the feminized silence to which utterance in general may be subjected is an open question. It may be that Catullus himself does not wish to identify quite so closely with Attis, hoping that the latter can serve as a kind of cautionary figure. C. 63 thus concludes with the narrator's prayer not to suffer as has the main character: "may your madness, goddess, be in its entirety far from my household" (v. 92: *procul a mea tuus sit furor omnis, era, domo*). But this prayer may be read as suggesting the narrator's fear that he and his feminized character may not be so different after all, precisely in that the prayer does not assert, as if with any power, but rather asks more humbly for distance. Indeed, not just the narrator but his "household" (*domus*) is evidently felt to be at some risk, at least in the fiction of the poem. In this connection, we may recall that the gloom of certain of Catullus's poems comes in part from his feeling, consequent upon his brother's death, that his whole household has been lost. It may be, then, that he feels himself to be, like Attis, exposed to forces that, if handled improperly, could swiftly and completely overwhelm him. This is emphasized by the way in which Attis is introduced in c. 63, a way strikingly similar to how Catullus begins his own story in c. 101: Attis has "been carried over deep seas in a swift ship" (v. 1: *super alta uectus Attis celeri rate maria*). Attis would thus serve in a way like Ariadne, as a vivid, literal figuration of the somewhat more metaphorical possibility of Catullus's own subjection to silence.

MASCULINE POET AND/AS FEMINIZED FIGURE

On this reading of c. 63's opening line, Attis represents one version of what Catullus suspects may await all language users including himself,

if "carried" away by an unrealistic sense of agency relative to discourse and silence.² From this perspective, c. 63's astute psychologizing may be read as depending in part on an uncomfortably close identification indeed between the masculine poet and his feminized main character. Attis's physical dedication would represent Catullus's own poetic commitment taken one step further (or too far). Throughout the poem, Catullus seems to be familiar with the (outward) cult of Attis's goddess and its crucial demand. But such details serve mainly to contextualize his depiction of a feeling of fear, the fear that capacity for action, including utterance, will prove ineffectual against silence or perhaps even ironically bring it about.³ The rest of Catullus's concluding prayer is thus not really action, for the poet like any language user cannot speak truly to his own benefit. Instead it is a rather desperate expression of hope that the goddess, a being whose powerful overhearing fairly determines whether utterance is meaningful, will choose not to afflict him as she can and as he cannot truly control against. It seems that the goddess's madness cannot but descend on someone, and Catullus hopes only that it will not be him: "Great goddess, divine Cybebe, divine lady of Dindymus . . . make others incited, make them rapid" (vv. 91 and 93: *dea magna, dea Cybebe, dea domina Dindymi / . . . / alios age incitatos, alios age rapidos*).

We may say, then, that Catullus is fearful of being feminized in a way like Attis. For the poet as exemplary language user, this is a fear of language use proving ineffectual, unmeaningful, or, perhaps most precisely, unintentionally consequential. Like Attis, Catullus would be aware of his mistake too late; unlike Attis, however, Catullus knows that such a thing is possible, thanks to his poetics of silence. As Janan notes in this context, a pressing issue is "the inadequacy of Attis's language." But as we have seen, in Catullus's view the poet's language, too, is inadequate to the problem of expression, since all expression is, in one way or another, met and overmatched by silence.⁴ Attis would thus indeed figure a feminized aspect of Catullus, not despite Catullus's more masculine control over discourse but precisely because of the ultimate "inadequacy of language," including poetry as well as other cultural practices.⁵

If c. 63's goddess is somewhat naturalized, as something close to the poet's own potential experience as language user, her cult practices remain exotic and alienating both to Catullus's sensibility and to his sense-perceptual imagination. C. 63's soundscape makes worship of Cybebe a matter of the same defamiliarizing sounds, vocal and other,

that beset Ariadne upon Bacchus's arrival in c. 64. In particular, c. 63 is pervaded by the "strange percussive rhythms" taken to characterize the cult. One striking feature of the poem itself, evidently innovative in antiquity, is that those rhythms are not only suggested by its many references to the percussive instruments but also evoked in the poem's meter. Called "Galliambic" after *Galli* or *Gallae*, who were the cult's castrated attendants, the meter allows Catullus to achieve a range of effects appropriate to the meanings of lines.⁶ Above all, he is able to sustain, via the meter's most common form, a feeling of swiftness in line with the poem's explicit interest in speed, in the drama centering around Attis's hasty action.⁷ Thanks to this evocative use of an exotic meter, the poem seems to weigh Catullus's sympathy for Attis against some necessary, salutary distance from that dangerous situation. The central figure is both thrillingly similar to and thankfully different from the poet. In other words, the poem's form works both to convey effectively the psychology of Attis's experience and, in drawing attention to itself as unusual, to frame its main character's emotions and transformations as peculiar to this art form. At least in theory or in hope, Attis's experience need not serve to model Catullus's. But in practice, that is, in context of a poetics of silence, Catullus clearly fears that he himself is subject to just such a wholly feminizing silence.

STRANGE SOUNDS AND STRANGER TRANSFORMATIONS

In the world of c. 63, the strangeness of Attis's experience is reflected in the strange soundscape, including both vocal and especially instrumental sounds. These are emphasized to a degree that goes beyond even what attended Bacchus's arrival in c. 64. C. 63 may thus be read as offering an even more intense image of how contact with nonhuman forces, including the divine, disturbs human beings in particular by making their language unmeaningful. Special attention is given to percussion and its rhythms, evidently disorienting and hypnotic. Attis explicitly, and through her the other initiates, is presented as in a dreamlike state or living nightmare, into which the rhythms served as initiation and out of which they hinder escape (esp. vv. 39–47).

A first measure of this may be found in Attis's first act as a "her." It occurs while she/he is "still spotting the ground with fresh blood" (vv. 7–8: *ut relictā sensit sibi membra sine uiro / etiam recente terrae sola sanguine maculans*) in a manner at once vividly suggesting self-castration and connoting both ritual stain and, not unrelatedly in the ancient

imagination, menstruation. Attis picks up and starts playing a drum to accompany herself singing (vv. 8–11):

Swift she took in her snowy hands a light drum,
your drum, Cybebe, your initiate, O mother,
and, beating on that hollowed back of a bull with delicate fingers, 10
started, all trembling, to sing to her fellow travelers.

niueis citata cepit manibus leue typanum,
typanum tuum, Cybebe, tua, mater, initia,
quatiensque terga tauri teneris caua digitis 10
canere haec suis adorta est tremebunda comitibus.

This passage suggests how the subtle provocations of the sounds are linked to and transfigure the main character's transformation. Attis's hands may be "snowy" only if they are not bloody, as we imagine they must have been only a moment ago; both because of the nature of the act and in line with Attis's haste, we may imagine that the castration was quite bloody indeed. It may be, then, that Attis's "snowy" hands are meant to suggest the color of the blood either by the red-white contrast we have seen operative already in other poems (e.g., c. 64, c. 80) or, perhaps, by a suggestion of pallor due to blood loss. So far as I am aware, this moment would be unique in linking the "lover's pallor" (as we have seen in connection with c. 80 in chapter 2) not with the general paleness of love as sickness but with the particular paleness of anemia.⁸

In this connection, we could consider the fact that Attis is "trembling" (*tremebunda*) as an additional proof of her physical weakness serving to symbolize her—formerly his—psychological weakness: in choosing to become Cybebe's follower, he revealed and then embodied his faltering strength, his femininity. Without wishing to medicalize too technically, I think we may take the color of Attis's hands, alongside that trembling, as signifying her new femininity indeed.⁹ As with Ariadne's entire body, Attis's white hands and "delicate fingers" (*teneris . . . digitis*) are suggestive of the *lack* of exposure to outdoor work, and with it the sun, considered by the ancients to be desirable in a woman. Just as Ariadne's ideally pale body was, in extremis, paradoxically exposed to the sun as well as to the wind and blown water, so are Attis's hands paradoxical: having had strength enough to castrate, albeit a strength increased by madness (v. 4: *stimulatus ibi furenti rabie, uagus animis*), they are now, as a result of their "successful" action, pale and delicate or "tender."

And yet those weakened fingers are able to "beat" or "shake" (*quattientes*) the drum, albeit light, as their owner is able "to sing" (*canere*), a capacity virtually synonymous, as we have seen, with composition and recitation of poetry. The passage's repetition of "drum" serves then not only to emphasize the instrument's presence and importance but also to suggest its defamiliarizing effect. We may say further that the close connection between the new tenderness of Attis's hands, evidently but mysteriously a consequence of her castration, and the drum as it is a skin ("that hollowed back of a bull") implies a similarity between human and animal: Attis may beat, but like the bull she has been made, by being dismembered, into an instrument of the goddess. It may not be too much to say, borrowing Roman terms, that she has become an *instrumentum uocale*, a "speaking tool" (Varro *Rust.* 1.17).

SEDUCTION AWAY FROM DISCOURSE

In this way Attis would, like Ariadne, serve to figure further what Catullus represents himself as having experienced as a poet: a feminization, caused by overpowering silences, that verges on dehumanization in the form of animalization. The narrator emphasizes this obliquely, repeating "drum" in order to apostrophize the goddess in a way that suggests the ironic superiority of his knowledge to Attis's. In turn, this difference suggests again that the narrator's command of the poem's meter or rhythm is likewise superior to Attis's ability to beat the drum. Catullus knows enough to have mastered and, however desperately, remained aloof, while Attis is depicted in this first part of the poem as having been completely taken in.

In the context of a poetics of silence, we may not be surprised that the seduction, both affecting Attis and effected by her, is framed primarily in terms of sounds. In her first speech, to her companions, Attis imagines their shared destination, the "Phrygian home of Cybebe, the Phrygian groves of the goddess"; the epithet "Phrygian" connoted, in antiquity as today, a musical mode. In her imagination, this is a place (vv. 21–26)

where the cymbals' voice sounds, where the drums bellow back,
 where the Phrygian flautist sings heavily with a curved reed,
 where the "heather-bearing" Maenads violently toss their heads,
 where they rouse the holy dedicated objects with piercing ululations,
 where that wandering cohort of the goddess has been wont to fly,
 whither it behooves us to hasten with swift triple-stepping.

ubi cymbalum sonat uox, ubi tympana reboant,
 tibicen ubi canit Phryx curuo graue calamo,
 ubi capita Maenades ui iaciunt hederigerae,
 ubi sacra sancta acutis ululatus agitant,
 ubi suevit illa diuae uolitare uaga cohors,
 quo nos decet citatis celerare tripudiis.

25

The sense-perceptual modes here are mixed but center around music and closely related movement, vaguely "dance." Likewise Attis's image, explicitly exhortative, shades quickly into seduction through its incantatory rhythms—we note the prominence of cymbals and drums—and repetition (of "where," *ubi*). As the latter culminates so as to suggest the inevitability of the journey, so is Attis's imagistic "prophecy" immediately fulfilled not only by a literal journey but by the willingness, even if it is unmindful or maddened, of the travelers. Having survived the sea voyage, they are quick to fill their new location with the expected and desired sounds: "the *thiasus* ululates suddenly to their shaking tongues, / the light drum bellows in response, the hollow cymbals clatter in response" (vv. 27–28: *thiasus repente linguis trepidantibus ululat, / leue tympanum remugit, caua cymbala recrepant*). Although in terms of grammatical subjects, these sounds come on their own, in fact from the shaken *thiasus* through drum to cymbal they are all the results of instruments sounded, first, by the travelers' "shaking tongues."

With this in mind, the sounds are thus not only, as it were, Cybebe's Siren song, symbolizing as we have seen the inspiration and disorientation effected, in the Roman imagination, on initiates into such eastern cults. The sounds are also here the result and audible sign of initiation, standing for the initiates' willing but incompletely comprehending participation in the cult. That the precipitating sound, their "ululating" voices, is a byword for inarticulate expression serves to emphasize how their action is a complex misdirection of the will, perhaps even an abrogation of their humanity as that is characterized by the capacity for articulate speech. They raise their voices very audibly, loud enough that the *thiasus* is shaken and the other instruments echo them back, in their turn metonymic as we have seen for speaker-as-instrumentum uocale. Their voices thus constitute significant presence in the soundscape. But these are voices only, not articulate speech: *linguis trepidantibus*, "shaking tongues," raises the possibility of "tongues" punningly meaning "language" . . . but only to exclude it. These *Gallae* vocalize but, like animals, they do not speak.

As a result, Attis and her followers misuse indeed what ought to be their defining capacity, the capacity for language. In the Greco-Roman imagination, they have thus become not only feminized but also in an important way nonhuman.¹⁰ The dehumanizing effect is stronger, and the danger to articulate masculinity closer to hand, in that the followers are both contrasted and identified with Attis: their literal speechlessness, a virtual silence, is the response to Attis's speech and draws attention to its characteristics. In particular, Attis is paradoxically both feminine and leaderly, the latter regularly a masculine role in the Roman imagination as in the public, political discourse, suggesting a kind of virility.¹¹ As we have seen, Attis's speech is not merely persuasive but perlocutionary: in addition to exhorting, in itself it embodies and, in its effects, brings about his prediction of an exotic soundscape.

ATTIS'S ARIADNIC MORNING AFTER

As in the strongest examples of Catullus's poetics of silence, any perlocutionary force to Attis's speech in c. 63 is heavily ironized or even wholly fictional. Falling victim to his fantasy, as it develops in ways he desired but predicted incompletely, Attis stands as an example of how speech in the end is answered not by further speech, as in ordinary conversation, but by the silence of a universe that has been revealed as indifferent to human discourse. As she discovers on that awful morning after, Attis's world is filled with sounds other than those of her own or of any human making: devoid of human meaning, they are dehumanizing. The Gallae thus altogether (vv. 36–43)

out of their excessive labor seize upon sleep without dinner.
 Thick with a slipping languor, sleepiness burdens their eyes;
 away into soft quiet passes the rabid madness of the mind.
 But when the sun, of golden mouth, with its radiant eyes
 has surveyed the white ether, the hard earth, the wild sea,
 and pushed back the night's shadows with its vital noisy-
 footeds [sc. horses],
 then Sleep, swiftly fleeing, went away from roused Attis;
 into her trembling bosom the Pasithea goddess received
 him [sc. Sleep].

40

nimio e labore somnum capiunt sine Cerere.
 piger his labante languore oculos sopor operit;
 abit in quiete molli rabidus furor animi.
 sed ubi oris aurei Sol radiantibus oculis
 lustravit aethera album, sola dura, mare ferum,

40

pepulitque noctis umbras uegetis sonipedibus,
ibi Somnus excitam Attin fugiens citus abiit;
trepidante eum recepit dea Pasithea sinu.

In this context Attis considers her action in a telling silence, an absence of speech that is nevertheless distinct—in its image of her woken but wordless mind—from the silence that preceded in deepest sleep: "thus out of soft quiet, without her rapid fury, at once Attis in her heart recalled her deeds" (vv. 44–45: *ita de quiete molli rapida sine rabie / simul ipsa pectore Attis sua facta recoluit*). The reiteration of the night's "soft quiet" emphasizes, first, that the silence greeting Attis this morning after is, by contrast, nothing so soft: it is rather of a piece with a world in which the "earth is hard" (*sola dura*) and the "sea is wild" (*mare ferum*). As those natural objects and their epithets suggest, this is a world of uncompromising, inhuman signs, in which even the bright dawn is terrible both to behold and, emphatically, to hear, startling and disturbing with its loud clatter of hooves.¹²

Second, the same repetition emphasizes that the hardness is, as we have seen especially in connection with cc. 16 and 80 (discussed in chapter 2), almost invariably associated with the masculine. We may therefore call Attis's morning after "Ariadnic" in that she, too, wakes on the shore where she has been left behind by a man. The Ariadnic feeling may continue in that the mornings are anticipatory: Sleep's reception by the Pasitheat goddess prefigures Attis's reception by Cybebe, in parallel to Ariadne's "rescue" by Bacchus. In any case, both Attis and Ariadne, thoroughly feminized figures, are saved from total silence by Catullus, whose poetry overhears them into being. The awful paradox of Attis's particular experience of silence, of course, is that the man who abandoned her was her own previous (him)self. As the shifting genders suggest, language belonging to a masculine subject thus fashions a world whose silence applies, as usual, to a feminine subject. That the "same person" is here *both* the effective masculine speaker *and* the affected feminine subject is perhaps c. 63's most central trope into the abandonment and bewilderment that, in Catullus's view, characterize the feminized condition.

Insofar as it serves to capture the language user's simultaneous responsibility for his or her situation and incapacity to change it, the same trope figures the poet's own feeling of uncertainty about utterance in relation to silence. As with Ariadne, so with Attis does Catullus give voice to a feminized subjectivity not otherwise well represented in his wonted

discourses, much less traditional poetry. That her voice is hardly heard, however, emphasizes the weakness of that subjectivity as well as of the sociocultural positions to which it attaches. As with Ariadne, too, so with Attis does Catullus transfigure his own situation as it takes part in that feminized condition. She/he, he become she, is in many ways not a man of parts. Having recalled her actions, Attis "sees what she is without" (v. 46: *uidit sine quis*), in other words "what she has truly lost." What seemed to be clarity of vision is now revealed to be insanity, and simultaneously what seemed to be a deliberate action has in fact drastically limited the individual's capacity to act. Just after his self-castration, she "felt what limbs were left to her, without manhood" (*relicta sensit sibi membra sine uiro*). In a vivid figuration of the poet's experience of his own incapacity in language, Attis as an extraordinarily feminized being is not only a language user who may no longer utter meaningfully. She/he is also, quite precisely and literally, a man who can now no longer reproduce. His, and her, silence in discourse and ordinary cultural practice is total.

INSTEAD OF LAST WORDS, FINAL VOCAL SOUNDS

The complexity of Attis's feminization in c. 63 requires a somewhat complex response: on that Ariadnic morning after, Attis is woken to sounds that result from *his* own unmindful desiring as well as to sounds undesired by *her*. The soundscape is so meaningless as to pass for silence, reflecting and emphasizing the new meaninglessness experienced by the human being-in-language as language has been replaced by exotic noise and by the man as he has been unmanned. Both types of sound are terrifying, not least because they are overpowering compared to any capacity of speech truly to do, much less to undo, what has been done. A feminized subject in Attis's position, having been abandoned by a man, is at the mercy of natural elements and supernatural forces.

In that context, any sound she makes contributes to no ordinary conversation but only "carries her belated disavowal to the twin ears of the gods" (v. 75: *geminas deorum ad aures noua nuntia referens*).¹³ Cybele responds in part by commanding a lion to torment her immoderate follower with sound that is vocal but strictly unmeaningful: the beast is to "make all places sound back with bellowing roar" (v. 82: *fac cuncta mugienti fremitu loca retonent*). It says a great deal about Catullus's interest in silence that the lion's roar is in fact the final sound in the world of the poem (v. 86: *fremet*). Afterward there is only the poet's speech, which

of course is inaudible to the poem's characters, while Attis herself is kept silent.¹⁴

Here we may read Catullus as emphasizing that a part, at least, of the feminized figure's subjection to silence is the result of speech acts by other subjects. Disturbingly, those other subjects include the poet, whose dependence on silence is, from this perspective, both a necessary feature of poetry and a regrettable diminishment of other language users' agency. Catullus may wonder whether that imposition of silence is worth it. When even—especially—the poet faces the problem of expression, of making himself or herself rightly heard, utterance may not be worth the silence on which it depends. Utterance may in fact result in silences that the speaker does not intend. As a single speaking subject may become multiple through the effects of writing, memory, poetry, and other discursive modes, the poet may discover that he—even a "he"—has effectively silenced himself, his self or person, in a "feminizing" way. By seeking to speak aloud as a poetic persona, the poet paradoxically abandons himself, his own historical person, to a sort of silence.

On First Overhearing Catullus Overhearing "Lesbia"

Catullus's capacity to make use of certain silences, amply attested in the poems we have considered, cannot change the fact that he, too, must tend in the end to go incompletely heard. As a final example of how Catullus represents this tendency quite powerfully in terms of feminized figures, we turn to c. 51 ("That man seems to me equal to a god"; *ille mi par esse deo uidetur*). In this poem perhaps more than any other, Catullus figures himself as given over to a feminized silence. He expresses his distance from a desired interaction in terms taken directly from a woman's expression of her own experience, for of course c. 51 is a translation or adaptation of a poem by Sappho, an Archaic Greek lyric poet who was easily the most celebrated woman poet in Greco-Roman antiquity (her c. 31).¹⁵

This reading of c. 51 allows us to come full circle in our consideration of Catullus's poetics of silence through comparison with the poem with which we began, c. 6. As we saw in chapter 1, in c. 6 Catullus imagines a fully, even excessively, sense-perceptible scene out of too little actual evidence (Flavius's "vainly silent" bedroom) or even actually out of

nothing. C. 6 thus depends on Flavius's real silence, if we believe his existence, or a wholly imaginary silence, if we do not. Perhaps more importantly in our current context, it also depends on and reinforces the silence that consists in the girlfriend being defined exclusively in terms of men's desires.¹⁶ When, then, Catullus delights in what he perceives to be a pleasurable personal capacity for saying outrageously aloud those stories otherwise kept silent, it is at the expense of feminizing certain figures via his own relatively masculine discourse.

In comparison to c. 6, c. 51 shows some important differences. In this poem Catullus does not imaginatively reconstruct another's experience out of silence but is instead on hand to witness it directly. Paradoxically, this more immediate experience is the more alienating. Catullus is at some distance from what he sees—but what, precisely, he may *not* hear—and the intimate personal association it implies, from which he is clearly excluded. As the poem develops its image of an experience increasingly internal to the excluded narrator, he is alienated as well from his own failing senses, in the manner of sickness. Finally, the poet figures a total separation from himself: writing his own incapacity, in a meaningful difference from his model he criticizes himself in terms that would seem to call him back from wasting his time in "leisure," *otium*, and toward "business," *negotium*. As the latter is a byword of traditional, public activities, c. 51 culminates in Catullus seeming to redirect himself from an implicitly feminized passivity—throughout, he is self-consciously similar to Sappho in her c. 31—toward more-masculine agency.

At that final moment, Catullus addresses himself by name. Although the speaker of the poem has already been marked as grammatically masculine, the direct address would seem to be an attempt precisely to save himself from the sort of feminizing, anonymizing silence into which he has been falling. If c. 6 is exemplary of the poet at his witty, imaginative best, in control of a fictional situation and thus very masculine, then c. 51 by contrast shows him rather controlled or fictionalized, almost helpless in the face of an actual situation that has marked him as ineffectual and therefore feminized. The fact that all of this is fiction, all poetry, shows again the poet's—the language user's—paradoxical complicity in his or her own eventual incapacity to make meaning. C. 51 thus vividly illustrates how language use depends on, and so tends to, silence; since language use includes poetry, paradoxically such final silence cannot but include the poet's.

CATULLUS'S SYMPTOMS AND SENSE PERCEPTIONS, INCLUDING
(NOT) HEARING

That man seems to me equal to a god,
that man, if it is possible, surpasses the gods,
who, sitting opposite, again and again
sees you and hears you

sweetly laughing. This snatches from miserable 5
me all my senses; for as soon as I
have seen you, Lesbia, nothing is left over for me
<of voice in my mouth>

but my tongue grows sluggish, and thin beneath my limbs
flows a flame, with their own sound 10
my ears ring, and there covers my eyes
a doubled night.

Leisure, Catullus, is a problem for you;
leisure you exult in and practice excessively;
leisure in times past has ruined kings 15
and fortunate cities.

Ille mi par esse deo uidetur,
ille, si fas est, superare diuos,
qui sedens aduersus identidem te
spectat et audit

dulce ridentem, misero quod omnis 5
eripit sensus mihi; nam simul te,
Lesbia, aspexi, nihil est super mi
<uocis in ore>

lingua sed torpet, tenuis sub artus
flamma demanat, sonitu suopte 10
tintinant aures, gemina teguntur
lumina nocte.

Otium, Catulle, tibi molestum est:
otium exsultas nimiumque gestis;
otium et reges prius et beatas 15
perdidit urbes.

On the surface of c. 51, the symptoms experienced by the speaker are general to a traditional presentation of the lover's experience as being

similar to sickness, in its final forms approximating death. At a meta-poetic level, the speaker is specifically feminized indeed in that "his" sense-perceptual experience in c. 51 is, as noted, a translation or adaptation of what was originally a "her experience": Sappho's, in her c. 31. From a certain perspective, this raises again the question of whether and how the poems correspond to the historical Catullus. In the context of how Catullus's poetics of silence includes feminized voices and silences, we may answer those questions somewhat differently.

In the context of a masculine discourse, women's voices go largely unheard; as a result, as we have seen, feminine is virtually defined as unheard and tends indeed toward nonhuman, as feminized figures are unwittingly limited in a fundamental human capacity for articulate speech. Catullus's appropriation in c. 51 of what ancient readers would have recognized immediately as a woman's experience thus serves to represent how the speaker himself, despite speaking, even in speaking, has in his own view been subjected to a kind of silence. The narrator feels his model's silence as the character experiences his own. On this reading, Catullus's intersubjective ventriloquism of Sappho vividly illustrates how the poet, in his compulsive practice of poetry, is complicit in his own silencing. Catullus has feminized his own lyric self. In this connection, we note that a crucial part of c. 51's list of symptoms is focused on sound or rather its absence or distance, the inefficacy of the poet's voice, and the resultant fact that the poet's self-generated sounds are ultimately solipsistic.

We may see this more precisely by unpacking the scene. Clearly the speaker is in a setting involving at least two other people, Lesbia and the man who accompanies her, and probably more if it is, as seems likely, somewhat public (perhaps a *convivium*). The speaker is close enough to see but evidently not close enough to hear: Lesbia's laughing is for him a matter of sight, not sound. Deepening the pathos, his sight is focused in fact, as if in spite of the narrator's wishes, not on Lesbia herself but on the man who, in contrast to Catullus, can and does hear Lesbia's laughter. Unlike the speaker, "that man" (v. 1: *ille*) sits directly opposite her (v. 3: *sedens aduersus*), "looks right at her" and, most importantly for our purposes, can "hear [her] sweetly laughing" (vv. 4–5: *spectat et audit / dulce ridentem*). In a decisive change from Sappho's c. 31, Catullus's "that man" (*ille*), a particular man, replaces her "any man" (ὅστις), "whoever." It may be that Catullus has in mind here a particular person indeed; from the degree of intimacy involved we may suspect that the

man is probably Lesbia's husband. In any case, however, what matters is that *someone* is able to hear what Catullus cannot, and is part of a conversation from which Catullus feels himself excluded.

We may imagine that the speaker of c. 51 is, like the speaker of c. 6, able to imagine the unheard sounds very vividly. As a result, his limited access to Lesbia by sight alone is complemented, again perhaps despite his wishes, by an image or fantasy of what it would be like to hear her laughter, not to mention her voice in the conversation. His sighting of Lesbia laughing with the other man is thus enough to make him start to draw his attention inward, from limited but realistic sense perception toward the unlimited, but ultimately powerless, possibilities of his imagination.

In this way Catullus is feminized indeed: like Ariadne in c. 64, he is called into being by a sort of silence as he is precisely excluded from any actual language on a beloved's part. Here of course his beloved is Lesbia. Although c. 51 has been read by some as an opening gesture by Catullus as he sought a relationship with Lesbia, in this connection it may be that the speaker responds to the scene so intensely because he either cannot hope to change it or perhaps is sick at heart about how it has been changed already, in a way that runs counter to his desires. Thinking in this way about the speaker as having been silenced already by a breakup—as we have seen, Catullus elsewhere depicts himself as destroyed by Lesbia's cavalier treatment—we can account more richly both for the intensity of his symptoms and for the poem's controversial final stanza.¹⁷

THE POET'S LOST POWER OF SPEECH

On this reading, the speaker's developing symptoms emphasize his exclusion, by outside force, from cultural practices and discourse to which he used to have access or, perhaps more precisely, to which he used to pretend such access within the safe and self-determining confines of his poetic fantasies. The parallels, in both situation and emotion, to figures like Ariadne and Attis are clear. Like them, and like another version of "himself" as he is depicted responding to his brother's death (in cc. 65, 68[a], and 101, discussed in chapters 4 and 5), "Catullus" as the speaker of c. 51 is isolated, virtually abandoned by being excluded from discourse. As we have seen, this is particularly the fate of feminized figures in the worlds of epic and myth.

We may adduce another expressly feminine point of comparison.

In losing all his senses (vv. 5–6: *misero quod omnis / eripit sensus mihi*), in his own terms Catullus is most of all like the young bride in c. 66, all of whose "senses" are "snatched" from her (v. 25: *sensibus ereptis*). Although the adjective "wretched" or "heart sick" (*misero*) makes clear from its grammatical ending that the narrator of c. 51 speaks of himself as a man, this may only intensify how the feeling of feminized exclusion is surprisingly appropriate and deep.¹⁸ There is a way, then, in which Catullus seems here to have lost his poetic voice along with his other capacities and therefore is reduced to appropriating Sappho's.

The loss of senses represents Catullus's changed and feminized situation in a telling sequence. First of all, he loses his power of speech (vv. 6–8: *nam simul te, / Lesbia, aspexi, nihil est super mi / <uocis in ore>*).¹⁹ The point is emphasized in the following line (v. 9: *lingua sed torpet*). In a way this is ironic as usual, in that the speaker speaks beautifully about not being able to speak. Nevertheless, this lost speech is, in the general context of Catullus's poetics of silence and the particular context of his self-representation as feminized, not to be taken as only a literary conceit. Catullus is, and has been, struck dumb in the manner of someone experiencing a divine epiphany. And like those who have seen what profane eyes ought not to see, he is led dizzyingly toward death. This is made clear by the thin flame, the ringing ears, and finally the darkness veiling his eyes. The emotional component of this experience is intensified by the thought that all of this could have been otherwise, or rather that the poet, knowing as he does the powers and limits of language, might have known better to begin with.

A NEWLY PERSONAL POEM, AND THEREFORE THE PROBLEM OF EXPRESSION

In the context of Catullus's poetics of silence, the final stanza of c. 51 is of a piece with the rest of the poem. The whole poem is, I think, best read not as part of Catullus's "courtship" of Lesbia but, if biographically at all, as an episode in a relationship already come to an end. It captures a moment of desire and therefore, by definition, absence. As we have seen, in particular there is an absence of sound, conversation, the poet's own language. I think we may imagine, then, that Catullus as the speaker sees Lesbia with another man, probably her husband, not for the first time ever, nor therefore falling in love at first sight, but later, after his own relationship with Lesbia has ended. It would deepen the pathos of the poem were Catullus thus incapable of speech except to reprimand himself; he loves and is left breathless by Lesbia after all,

despite it all, even still.²⁰ It is out of this feeling that Catullus must rail at himself, as both unable to talk his way out of the situation, such that he fails in a sense as a poet, and as needing to have known better to begin with.

In this connection we may note that the final stanza is personalizing only in appearance, and that fleeting. Catullus names himself, in the poem for the first and only time, and describes his own activity. But the activity is passive (he does too much of leisure, thereby doing nothing), and the poem concludes by focusing on larger entities rather than smaller (kings, cities) and on the abstraction of "leisure" (*otium*). This abstraction is, in Roman thinking, a negative, an absence of what counted for activity according to the standards of a traditional, masculine public culture. On the reading being advanced here, Catullus thus rails at himself, since he realizes only late that in a way his time has been misspent. The contrast between Catullus, an ineffectual individual, and the powerful collectives of kings and cities is not bathetic, for small and large are aligned in a common experience of a certain kind of weakness: the problem of expression, perhaps the prior problem of valuing the personal as a source for expression, the tendency of all utterance—of all activity?—toward meaningless silence. For this experience, a feminized subjectivity is, in the Roman mind as we have been seeing it, quite appropriate.

Catullus's translation or adaptation of Sappho's c. 31 thus draws deeply but freely on her language and structure to make a new point, interrogating the ways in which Catullus, standing in for any (formerly) powerful speaking subject, does not so much use language as he is defined by its limits. As Janan puts it:

A veil is being drawn over the site where Woman and the divine commune in their shared excess. . . . Similarly, Catullus is transformed, between the two moments crystallized in 51.1–4 and 51.5–12, from a witness who can see to one who cannot. . . . He is a witness to the degree that he attests his own inability to read the moment he is recording. . . . What Catullus is staging . . . is immense pressure applied to the conceptual limits the Symbolic places on "knowing," and to the way in which these limits are made to support masculine subjectivity in particular.²¹

On Janan's reading, Catullus desires just that feminine jouissance, which his ostensibly masculine subjectivity ought to prohibit. As we have seen, it is just such jouissance, such unlimited pleasure, that he seems to take in saying outrageously aloud what otherwise is kept in

silence. As we have also seen, however, since every utterance depends on silence, it is silence that must win out.

THE POWERLESSLY VOLUBLE POET OVERHEARING "LESBIA"

To represent himself as limited in masculine discourse, Catullus aligns himself as we have seen with feminized figures. A final complication for this figuration as it takes place in c. 51 is the fact that the narrating "he" speaks himself into that feminine position only by speaking over, and so silencing, not one but two women. One is "Lesbia," probably a pseudonym for Clodia; the other is Sappho of Lesbos.²² Catullus's Lesbia is a paradoxical figure: loved and loathed, desired and possessed and dispossessing, she may be drawn from life, from a relationship between Catullus and Clodia, but also allows a drawing over in fiction. If, as we have seen, Catullus the speaker in c. 51 cannot hear her (or, possibly, is allowed to hear her no longer), Catullus the composing poet has ensured that she is not heard: in the poem she is seen, not heard, to be laughing; and she says nothing. It would not be enough to note that her entrance, or lack thereof, into sense perception is modeled on the parallel figure in Sappho's original poem, for we have seen that Catullus is able to change and to keep what he wishes. Quite specifically, then, does Lesbia go unheard and is Catullus therefore consigned to a feminized silence.

In this connection, in an insistent difference indeed from Sappho's poem, even Lesbia's currently being seen is displaced, as Catullus focuses on the man next to her. This seems additional evidence for Catullus's feeling in the poem being jealousy after the fact. In any case, we cannot escape the fact that, despite the seemingly powerful effects on the speaker, Catullus yet speaks in c. 51, as in c. 6 and other poems, of a woman as she exists chiefly in relation to men. Even when she was experienced directly by Catullus, then, too, it was as a dazzling object of his vision—he fell in love "as soon as [he] saw [her]" (vv. 6–7: *simul te, / Lesbia aspexi*)—and not, it seems, as a speaking subject in her own right. Whether or not she represents a constriction of the historical Clodia, the Lesbia of c. 51 is quite narrowly constrained in discourse.

The paradox of a properly speechless individual having power over the voluble poet is deepened by Lesbia's overlap with Sappho. Sappho is also a "Lesbia," even more literally in "being from Lesbos," the original meaning of the adjective. It may be argued that Sappho is not, in the poem's conception, recalled precisely as a woman, for she is the stuff of the poem's original being and so comprises the very conditions of its

possibility. More generally throughout Greco-Roman antiquity, Sappho was revered as a poet in a way that seemed generally to remove her from comparison with ordinary women as well as men.²³ But I would suggest that, in the context of Catullus's poetics of silence, "Sappho," the poet and her poetry, remains because Sappho, the historical person, has been silenced. That "she" has survived the ultimate silence of death is merely a figure of speech, a function of literary tradition.

Moreover, as Catullus's version of her poem makes clear, that function is easily reversed or undone. Even "she," the figuration of her character that appears to speak in her poem, is silenced in Catullus's version by the gender of "miserable" (*misero*, unambiguously masculine) and by the final stanza in which "Catullus," no Sappho, is named. Her phrasings may allow Catullus a partial solution to the problem of expression, but the corollary is that she no longer speaks, or is no longer needed in order for the poem to speak itself in a recognizably similar form. That this could happen in turn to Catullus is, no doubt, a frightening possibility for the poet. But his fellow feeling for such a silenced figure, such a feminized figure, does not undo Sappho's prior silencing. In fact the poet depends on it.

Catullus's identification with Sappho seems weaker than his alignment with Ariadne and Attis, as if Sappho, despite the verisimilitude of "her" symptoms, is even less a real woman than the mythological Ariadne, less a feminized figure than the fictional Attis. All nonetheless serve as analogues for the poet's own experience of silence. That silences are different from one another does not change the basic fact that all these figures, all these former beings-in-language, are subject to silence. Even as they speak movingly of their conditions, as their speech is made into the material of poems they become spoken. As a result, they continue to speak only insofar as they are listened into being; paradoxically, they continue to be speaking persons only insofar as they are made into spoken figures. Even as they seem to speak movingly of their conditions, they do so only so long as readers continually redeem them from silence.

Through imitations and appropriations of such voices, Catullus takes on women's silences as figurations for his own. At the same time, consciously as well as inevitably, with great artistry and with ambivalence toward the fact that his speech depends on others' silences, he repeats and reinforces certain constraints on women's utterance. This "natural" tendency toward an occlusive repetition makes even Catullus's

sophisticated poetics of silence ultimately unable to ironize silence satisfactorily, whether by ironizing it away or by finding within it a significance that would do justice to the frustrated desires of human meaning making. Catullus's intersubjective ventriloquism of women's voices, of the feminized figure, thus tends to replicate various structures of constraint on utterance and, so, on the fundamental meaning of human meaning making, its indexicality, its signification by contiguity or proximity of the speaking subject.

Catullus may wish, at points, to speak from outside those structures, but in the poems we have considered, at least, he cannot. The voice of poetry itself prohibits it, being too much louder and lasting than any poet's own, more pervasive and, depending on the point of view, pernicious. As we have seen, structures of constraint range from the interpersonal (Theseus abandons Ariadne) or even the intrapersonal (Attis silences "himself," then discovers that "she herself" is met with meaningless noises tantamount to silences) through the social (Catullus cannot, is not allowed, to hear "Lesbia," entertaining a fantasy in the presence of her factual man) to the natural (Catullus's brother is taken from him, such that even the epic journey is met in life, as in poetry it is emphatically not, with meaningless silence inimical to the emotions). To bring any of those silenced figures into speech, Catullus must speak. But in speaking he both breaks their silences and replicates them. In turn, for Catullus to continue to speak, "Catullus" must speak or, rather, be spoken in the form of poems read aloud. However authentically, readers bring Catullus into being only as his literary self or selves, "Catullus," and even those personae only as they are continually displaced by the present readers who are, in turn, displaced by the voice of the poem. As a result of these complex interactions, there is only ever the speaking voice, always dependent on others' silence. In the end, only silence remains.

Conclusion

It disturbs / And vexes meditation with its strange / And extreme silentness.

Coleridge, "Frost at Midnight," vv. 8–10

Despite the general consensus that Catullus's poems are not likely to represent the historical poet accurately, in reading the poems we may nevertheless be left with a feeling of contact with another person's mind. Such is our awareness, albeit unconscious, of the pervasive erasure of becoming by nothing, and such our desire to resist that entropy of meaning making, that we regularly read scanty traces such as poems as standing for the fullness of a being-in-language. We thus naturally sympathize with Catullus as he envisions his brother's small, pale foot; or with Ariadne watching Theseus's ship grow smaller; or with Attis looking down at what she/he has done and seeing nothing. As readers we experience a poem and, I think, naturally hope to have encountered the being-in-language of the poet, the historical person, himself.

By listening to poems for their silences, as well as for the silences of their speakers and other subjects, I hope to have shown what it may mean to attend more closely to silence as it is a matter of interest at least in Catullus, certainly in some other Latin poetry, perhaps in other ancient or premodern literature. Catullus was inspirational to other authors, such that we might expect to find meaningful poetics of silence in later works. More generally, by reading certain poems in the light—or illuminating sound—of a poetics of silence, we may learn to listen to silence as a meaningful part of human meaning making. In the hands of a poet like Catullus, that fact of our being-in-language can be made

into an essential feature of literature or other art. The result is a poetics of silence.

By way of generalizing further, it is worth returning to the way in which ancient poetry figures itself as speech overheard, as somehow *audible*. In Latin, a "poem" is *carmen* or *carmina*, literally "song" or "songs," a term whose connotations converge with those of the term "poetry," etymologically a "making" or a "doing." A song or poem takes up its performer's and its audience's time as well as making use of the performer's voice. Audible, a poem is insistently nonsilent, even in some forms antisilent.¹ As a result, this sort of poem implies a literal audience of "listeners." This is emphasized by the sociology of ancient reading, much of which was done aloud and with awareness of group-performative elements.² Insofar as silence is a meaningful element of aural practice, we thus have reason to expect that sound and silence work together to produce great effects on the meaning of an ancient poem.

Going further, Catullus may be read as recognizing that any utterance, any actual linguistic or literary act, requires a corresponding action or selection against other potential acts. Poetic utterance in particular requires a corresponding silence. This silence ramifies into multiple types and forms.³ As a thing that takes up some of our limited time, poetry as it "makes" or "does" necessarily makes other things impossible. If that exclusion is not absolute in fact, then it is significant in the fiction of a poem insofar as it relates to the audience's and the performer's limited time and capacity for perception. In particular, a poem as an audible utterance precludes, or at least insists on imagining the preclusion of, other utterances, with its own sound superseding others' and so requiring, even imposing, their silence. Presupposing a pause as the speaker draws breath, a poem thus depends on a precedent silence that occupies a strange space between factual and purely fictional. If only *this* poem were not, *another* poem could be; but this poem *is*, and therefore there is both a silence that precedes and a silence that comes alongside, suppressing other potential claims on the audience's attention. This is one "meaning" of a poem's precedent silence as a sign that is strictly inaudible but nonetheless interpretable: there is an utterance to come, for/therefore other utterances are precluded or foreclosed. The necessity of silence thus allows for a paradoxical signification both forward, or outward, and backward in time.

We cannot say that Catullus's poems exactly make a "virtue" of this necessity. As we have seen, their valuation of silence as an inevitable

fact of language and of life varies too widely, in parallel to their wide range of topics and tones. As a result, they treat their own silences not as indisputable facts but as aspects of experience that are interesting in their relation to discourse and to how discourse comprises human beings-in-language. As we have seen, however, his poems may nevertheless be read as enacting a dramatic and consequential transformation of silence from "inevitable linguistic fact" to "essential part of literary fiction." In this sense, Catullus's poetics of silence would seem an essential enough feature of his poetry to be ranked alongside, for example, his longer-recognized interests in intersubjectivity, positionality, and social performance

Perhaps above all, attention to a poetics of silence helps to emphasize and nuance the critical observation that Catullus's poetry gives the impression of being overheard. That description may be nuanced in terms of the poems' concrete figurations and abstract senses of their own performativity: how they purport to be overheard from secret spaces, from public places into which private meaning has intruded, from behind closed doors, from moments of properly limited publicity and inappropriate intimacy. To a remarkable degree and with remarkable consequences, Catullus's poetics, in my view, willfully requires that this over-hearing includes—in variously ramifying shapes and types—silence itself. This poetics of silence corresponds to a literal spontaneity in the poems, that is, to even their most effusive-seeming examples as resulting from the poet's act of artistic will.⁴ As one human act among others, silence too may be spontaneous, willful, intentional. It is thus easily made meaningful. In other words, silence, being already perceptible, is also, in some of its forms at least, intelligible as a meaningful gesture. As we have seen, silence may be read as a sign in its own peculiar terms.

Catullus may therefore productively be read as treating silence as a sign whose meanings consist in its manner of indicating a signified that is, as a result, "inaudible" in various interesting ways. Silence may mean accidentally or historically or, in certain poems and situations, essentially. Catullus develops a range of responses to silence as various but, despite its variety, as always occupying attention in place of a potential utterance. In certain poems, an utterance or an entire being-in-language is kept just out of hearing in ways that are variously amusing, elusive, grave. Above all, Catullus treats this situation as an opportunity that the witty poet may take advantage of, which, indeed, he must take advantage of with certain urbanity if he is to be judged an aesthetic success and, therefore, a social one. Given—or imagining—an

absence of utterance from other potential speakers, the poet must, may, and does gleefully imagine for himself something sensational. At least at first he must do this, imagining if not something that is sensational in itself, then something that may make for sensational poetry. As we have seen, the story that is assumed to lie behind silence, the suppressed utterance, seems to be more useful to Catullus if it is somehow “trivial.” For there is the greater challenge for the poet aspiring to a success that consists, in part, in its surprise by contrast or, as we have seen it put, by “making a silk purse of a sow’s ear.”

At points, however, the contrast between silence or silenced speech and poetry proves too much for the poet to respond to in any way other than seriously, as silence starts to indicate its unfortunately most powerful form, the ultimate silence of death. More often, Catullus’s poetics of silence is rather more richly varied. By reading for how a perceptive poet may value silence as an opportunity for his own successful utterance, more than he would value a comparatively lesser utterance by another speaker, implicitly or explicitly less urbane, we have seen in greater detail some of the ways in which Catullus explores the more general relationship that was mooted in antiquity between poetry and its purpose of guaranteeing immortality in culture. Poetry’s capacity to preserve is, by definition, a relationship between utterance and silence.



Defining my argument in relation to scholarly work on silence in general, on Latin poetry in general, and on Catullus in particular, I have tried in this book to offer fresh readings of many important poems, including some that are well known and others that have been subjected themselves to a sort of silence, having received less attention in scholarship and criticism. Based on those close readings, I have argued that there is such a thing as a poetics of silence. I have sought to show how close consideration of silence—as structural principle, as thematic concern, and as a crucial aspect of the experience of beings-in-language—is applicable to poetry, literature, and utterance more generally. I hope thus to have enriched our reading of Catullus’s poems and, by extension, our understanding of Latin poetry, Latin literature, ancient literature, and the verbal and other arts that have come after.

I also hope to have deepened our understanding of silence. Silence deserves our attention. It may, in a way, lead to our continual re-creation. As in this conclusion’s epigraph, it ought to “disturb and vex our meditation,” leading first to the sort of reflective representation of the world

at which language seems to excel and, then, as it did for Coleridge no less than Catullus, helping to call that semblance into question. What does language only *seem* to do, in a sort of hopeful fiction that is really a suppression of what is, in fact, properly a part of silence? What human meanings, or what aspects of human meaning making, live rather in the spaces between words? In what ways might human being, seeming to be a kind of being-in-language, actually consist in its relationship to silence?

Having tried to read certain of Catullus's poems afresh from this perspective, I have the feeling that answers to those questions will not so much surprise us as cause an uncanny shock of recognition. Surrounded as we are by sounds, many of them allegedly of our own choosing, we stand to be surprised by how we may immediately and deeply recognize, as if literally "thinking again" or encountering again, the various meanings of various kinds of silence. In this connection, paying attention to silence reminds us of the sorts of meanings that were possible before so many of us were so continuously surrounded by sounds, before a deep pervasion of public life, personal life, and private time by recorded sounds. We need not agree entirely with, for example, a Merton or a Sontag to feel, at points, that such thinkers are right about such pervasion by sound being a kind of perversion of our being.⁵ Nor must we believe that a modern noisiness calls us away from the divine in particular to feel, as Merton himself does more generally, that it distracts from something of importance. In silence, at least as it is relative to our experience of noise, there is, still and always, an experience of high value.



Recently it has become possible to calculate the "sound," the vibration, that was generated by the aftereffects of the big bang as well as the average of the vibrations that pervade the observable universe.⁶ As a result we may understand the second law of thermodynamics, which requires that there be entropy, as implying an ultimate silence of the universe. Silence is therefore not a constant, nor really an absolute, but a thing to which we relate in time. Thinking about beginnings instead of endings, we may understand silence as the background against which sound has surprisingly come into being. It is one of the principles according to which sounds may be said to have internal structure and are differentiated from one another. It is the ground state to which sound, a state of excitement that requires an investment of energy, must return.

Paying attention to silence allows us to recognize its peculiar value as part of our own meaning making, to reconsider it, and, if we choose, to recover it. In my view this process is aided by paying attention to how silence takes place in poetry. Since the rhythms of poetry may serve “to prolong contemplation” (Yeats), poetry helps to focus our attention on the fact that utterance and silence structure each other and make meanings together. Catullus may say outright that “Venus loves wordy talk” (55.20: *uerbosa gaudet Venus loquela*), but I hope to have shown that he also places high value indeed on silence as it contextualizes utterance, structuring it as well as opposing it. In certain poems at least, Catullus is deeply invested in the fact that, as beings-in-language, we are brought into freighted and meaningful relationships with silence. I have argued for the interest and plausibility of this reading—overhearing—of Catullus. I hope that other readers and listeners will seek to develop it further, correcting my work as needed. For the silence of an ancient author, the silences that are *in* an ancient author: these we modern readers may break and fill meaningfully indeed.

Notes

Introduction

1. For silence in literature, see, e.g., Billone 2007; Pérez 2000; Wood 1999; Schlant 1999; Steiner 1998; Zimmerman, Rojas, and Navia 1998; Hassan 1968; the dates of these works may suggest a renewed interest in silence coming alongside postcolonial studies. Among studies of silence in fields other than literature, I have found especially interesting Judkins 2011; Kania 2010; Achino-Loeb 2006; MacKendrick 2001; Kurzon 1997; Jaworski 1997; Dauenhauer 1980; Sontag 1969; Picard 1952; and Merton 1949.

2. In addition to the “war poets,” I think of, among others, Thomas Hardy, W. B. Yeats, A. E. Housman, Edward Thomas, and Isaac Rosenberg for World War I, and Randell Jarrell, Alun Lewis, Keith Douglas, and Karl Shapiro for World War II. A relative paucity of poets writing from and about World War II struck some commentators at the time (e.g., Robert Graves’s radio talk, “Why Has This War Produced No War Poets?,” October 1941); cf. the famous formulation by Adorno, noted in n. 3.

3. This saying may be a modification of a comment by Theodor Adorno (1955, 10a:30): “to write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric” (“nach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben, ist barbarisch”).

4. For Catullus’s text I generally follow Thomson 1998. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated. 55.17’s *lacteolae* . . . *puellae* presents a difficulty for translation in that *lacteolae*, literally “milky-white,” is “possibly colloquial (elsewhere only in late authors)” (Thomson 1998, 338 ad loc.). If the adjective is indeed colloquial, it might suggest the desirability of the young women’s breasts, mentioned by one of the women herself in v. 12: Camerius “is hiding here, on rosy nipples” (*en hic in roseis latet papillis*); thus Green, for example, renders it “bosomy” (2005).

5. Fitzgerald has Quinn “credit . . . Catullus with the invention of a poetry that seems to be overheard” (1995, 4), as opposed to seeming commanded by

the reader in analogy to an originally more public audience. Quinn argues that Catullus and his fellow “neoterics” were thus responsible for a “revolution” in poetic language, with Catullus especially taking steps from public narrative poetry toward more personal “meditative” lyric (1969). Cf. the important formulation by Miller, referring to c. 11 but with broader application: the poems produce “an image of artistic self-consciousness and deliberate intertextuality and intratextuality unimaginable in an oral performative context. The reader thus has a sense of being let into the secret reaches of the Catullan soul, even as he/she recognizes that it is through the soul’s conscious will to artistry that this very insight is possible” (1994, 105). The idea that poetry more generally is “overheard” finds an early, influential expression in John Stuart Mill: “Eloquence is *heard*, poetry is *overheard*. Eloquence supposes an audience; the peculiarity of poetry appears to us to lie in the poet’s utter unconsciousness of a listener. Poetry is feeling confessing itself to itself in moments of solitude” (1976, 12). One of the aims of this book is to show how Mill’s formulation might be revised to help account for ancient poetry’s palpable awareness of its audience.

6. On reading in antiquity, see, in addition to W. A. Johnson 2000; Edmunds 2001, 39–62 and 108–32; Gavrillov 1997; Saenger 1997 and 1982; Slusser 1992; Rosalind Thomas 1992; Horowitz 1991; Harris 1989; Knox 1968; Clark 1931; and Hendrickson 1929. Perhaps the locus classicus of silent reading in antiquity, and likewise the source of much confusion, is Augustine’s account of Ambrose reading to himself in silence (*Conf.* 6.3.3). Augustine makes clear that he himself was surprised not by the simple fact of silent reading but rather by how, in his view, this seemed to deprive others of Ambrose’s wisdom. But Augustine also acknowledges that Ambrose has chosen to read in silence for quite practical reasons, including resting his voice; here we may detect some sympathy on the part of one bishop for another.

7. A recent step in this direction is McNeill 2010.

8. Miller 1994, 4 and 5.

9. Miller 1994, 6. For a vivid description of the practice and possible effects of sequential reading in scrolls, see Skinner 2003, 178–79 (generally 173–80), after Van Sickle 1980, 5–6. On poetry collections, see the articles in *Arethusa* 13 (1) (1980), focusing on Augustan Rome. Cf. W. A. Johnson in reference to rhetoric and philosophy: “All the attributes of speech pertain to writing, which is an (audible) image of speech: for underlying every written text is a voice that animates it” (2000, 99, referring to Alcidas, *Soph.* 28.32).

10. See Heath 2005 and Munson 2005, with Stevens 2008b on the origin of language in Lucretius.

11. “Poetics of manhood” after Wray 2001a.

12. On sensorial anthropology, see Classen, Howes, and Synnott 1995, 1–10; Classen 1993, 1–14, 79–105, 121–138; Synnott 1991, 61–76; Carterette and Friedman, 1978; and Vinge 1975, 7–14 (on antiquity 15–46). For application to the classics, see Stevens 2008a and forthcoming.

13. For the silk purse and the sow's ear, see chap. 1, n. 2.

14. For the terms "to-be-said" and "deep silence," see Dauenhauer 1980. For the effect of this type of broken silence in a Roman context, cf. Janan's description of Catullus as "stand[ing] at the edge of what is legible as *dulce et decorum* to the conventional Roman order" (1994, 53). As examples, Janan notes that Catullus's "poetry regularly favors the staging of a private moment over the public arena"; "he celebrates the pleasures of love over the rewards of *negotium*, 'business'; his aesthetic allegiances are predominantly Hellenic and Hellenistic, rather than Roman." The context for Janan's description, after Segal 1970, is the contrast between Catullus and Cicero on a continuum of meanings for *otium*, "leisure."

15. See Stroup 2010; Krostenko 2001; Wray 2001a.

16. For Catullus's Transpadane affiliations, see chap. 4, n. 38.

17. For ancient testimonia about Catullus, see the collection in Wiseman 1985, but even these testimonia are mostly not information about the historical poet, Catullus, but reactions to the poems' persona, "Catullus." Having written, Catullus seems to quickly become written; cf. his self-comparison with several "written women," discussed in chaps. 6 and 7. Cf. Skinner 2003, 181–83. Havlock offers a scathingly sarcastic summation of attempts to work backward from Catullan persona(e) to the historical person (1939, 80–81); cf. William Butler Yeats, "The Scholars."

18. Especially compelling to my mind is Skinner: "Since the degree of conscious volition involved in the use of a model cannot be firmly established, it might seem prudent to divorce the "communicative intent" of the text, which may be inferred through an analysis of coding strategies, from any intent of the author. While making such a distinction is feasible in theory, however, it is impossible to maintain as a procedure of practical criticism. For Roman writers, the effectiveness of what they themselves called *imitatio* depended upon anticipated recognition of the source by an informed reader" (2003, xxxii–xxxiii). Cf. Skinner's incorporation of Barthes's notion of the *biographème*, "some trivial personal detail embedded, as a novelistic fact, within the text [which] can evoke a vivid if fragmentary impression of its producer" (12), resulting in "a friendly return of the author" ("un retour amical de l'auteur"; 1971, 13–14). See perhaps especially c. 16 as discussed in chap. 2 of this volume.

19. Janan 1994, 144; see her observation: "Traditional terms [*sc.*, *person* / *persona*, *individual*, and *self*] imply a consciousness completely self-aware, self-controlled, and autonomous. They thus resist accounting for the effects of forces that someone neither originates nor controls. I propose to supplement these with the concept of the *subject*—conceived, not as a substance (like a stone), but as a site through which social, cultural, institutional and unconscious forces move" (x). Cf. Oliensis's Freudian formulation, intended to "lay emphasis on effects that are meaningful not because they are intended, but because they are not. . . . Though it is always possible to reestablish an authorial intention on the

other side of the textual mirror, this conventional solution is itself predicated on a narcissistic projection—as if the author’s meaning answered exactly to the critic’s understanding! This does not mean that I will refrain from ascribing intentions to my authors (and believing my ascriptions), only that I do not always consider it necessary or useful to anchor the textual unconscious in the author’s intention” (2009, 55–56).

20. Gaisser 2009, 68.

21. Provocative readings of the poems’ “dialogic” interactions and of their organization into “cycles” are offered by, respectively, Miller 1994 and Janan 1994. See further discussion of thematic groups of poems, e.g., the “death” poems cc. 65, 68(a), and 101, discussed in chaps. 4 and 5.

22. Relative silence has also allowed for explorations of silence as the relative absence of signification in a range of sign systems and media. In this connection, scholarship often refers to John Cage’s piece for solo piano 4’33”, which consists of all the sounds present in the performance space aside from those produced by the piano, which goes unplayed but whose opening and closing mark the limits of the performance. See Gann 2010, with helpful remarks in Kania 2010 and Judkins 2011; cf. Cage 1961.

23. On sign systems and semiosis, see conveniently Sebeok 1994 and semi-nally Peirce 1991. The principle of meaningful difference is usually attributed to Saussure. For specifically linguistic studies of silence, see esp. Jaworski 1997 and Kurzon 1997, with useful distinctions in Judkins 2011.

24. Thomson 1998, 22. See 22–23: OGR “derive from a common source in the lost manuscript *V*, so called because it is usually believed . . . to have turned up in Verona”; and further 24–25: “It was seen and used by various Paduan and Veronese humanists in the two decades ca. 1290–1310,” as judged on the basis of script, “at any rate later than the ninth century,” i.e., Italian (proto-)humanist instead of Carolingian.

25. Butrica 2007, 29.

26. As Wiseman puts it in a different context, “we are dealing only with probabilities” (1969, 72).

27. Catullus’s textual tradition is evocative in relation to his special interest in silence, but it is not uniquely precarious. For example, the text of Propertius is extremely corrupt (perhaps famously so, as such things go, thanks to attention paid to that situation in Tom Stoppard’s *The Invention of Love*). His particular textual tradition notwithstanding, Propertius, like other ancient authors, would doubtless repay readings with silence in mind. On textual traditions, see generally Reynolds 1984.

28. See esp. Wiseman 2007a, with Butrica 2007 and Clausen 2007.

29. As Skinner writes, “some limited consensus seems to have been reached . . . that the opening sequence(s) of the polymetric section are elegantly structured . . . and that Catullus himself is responsible for that design,” but “there is certainly no agreement on whether [the remaining polymetric po-

ems] continue the *libellus*, represent another organized volume or volumes, or were gathered together and added posthumously. The *carmina maiora* probably circulated first as independent poems, but who compiled them may never be known" (2003, 48). Clausen sees a division into three volumes (of cc. 1–60, 863 lines; cc. 61–64, 802 lines; and cc. 65–116, 644 lines) but does not see in it the hand of the original author, and he considers it not so much an artistic arrangement as a mechanical arrangement by meter (2007, 59): an editor "more concerned to preserve than to present" (61) "retrieved all the poems he could. . . . To begin with he had the *libellus*: to it he could add any unpublished polymetric poems, an easy, mechanical decision that would not disturb the already published order" (61). Wiseman agrees with Clausen, following Quinn, about the division into three volumes, the "little books" being "three conveniently *volumen*-sized sections: 1–60 (848 lines), 61–4 (795 lines) and the elegiac poems 65–116 (646 lines)" (Quinn 1972, 66–67), but thinks that "the collection as we have it was designed as a whole; that Quinn's three *libelli*, each introduced by the Muses and with a Callimachean allusion, were the component parts of a greater unity" (Wiseman 2007a, 69). (The difference between Clausen's and Wiseman's counts derive from different treatment of lacunae within poems and interstices between them on the sheets.) Thomson is pessimistic: "What is hard to believe is that Catullus, who clearly intended to plan his book . . . , ever came to the end of laying it out" (1998, 10).

30. For "the death of the author," see seminally Barthes 1978.

31. Heath 2005, 1.

32. McNeill 2010.

Chapter 1. Natural and Sociocultural Silence in C. 6

1. Expressions of distaste may be exemplified by Morgan 1977 and Thomson 1998, 221. By contrast, Gaisser both praises c. 6 ("a fine example of concentrated use of performance terms and vulgarisms. . . . The only *actual* noise in the poem is 'the shaken creaking and back-and-forth motion of the rickety bedstead'" [2009, 89–90], citing vv. 10–11, including what "Tracy [1969, 235] considered perhaps 'the most remarkable hendecasyllable ever written'" and calls it "shocking in its use of coarse and obscene language." Skinner (2003, 34) finds c. 6 more meaningful: "Witty embellishment of the embarrassing details as they are spelled out is precisely what makes the poem so delightful. Art, it seems, is inherently falsifying; to produce its pleasurable effects, it must necessarily dissemble." Thus although she later calls c. 6 "frivolous," "the point of the joke" is serious: "lack of fit between reality and representation" (38); see further the following conclusions and later chapters on what Skinner calls "the ontological split between reality and what poetry has to make of that reality in order to give it everlasting life" (38). I have found especially illuminating Uden 2005 and Krostenko 2001, 237–38, 246–57. I agree with Richlin's assessment

that “Ellis’s commentary [1876] is by far the soundest on questions involving sexual matters” in Catullus (1992, 247n1). On Latin’s sexual vocabulary, see of course Adams 1982.

2. After Fitzgerald (1995, 94), regarding c. 12 as an exercise in “mak[ing] a silk purse out of the sow’s ear.”

3. E.g., Gaiser (2009, 91): “The shock value is increased by its position. It is the first poem to use such language, and it is positioned between the two kiss poems to Lesbia, which are completely different in tone.” At a further extreme, e.g., Hurley focuses on cc. 5, 7, and 48 as among “the most representative, the most intriguing texts for discussion” (2004, 38), from which c. 6 is implicitly excluded; Hurley does admit that her “clusters” are “no doubt somewhat arbitrary” (39). Cf. Wray 2001a, 152: the position of c. 6 is “arguably the single most striking and aesthetically jarring instance of juxtaposition in the entire collection.”

4. Either cc. 5 and 7 or poems very like them were evidently criticized as “insufficiently chaste” (16.4: *parum pudicum*) by some of Catullus’s contemporary readers. Such criticism may, however, be read as a sign of social cohesion: “The freedom that was allowed to [Catullus] by these men, and that he allowed to himself, stands in startling contrast to the practices of later satirists” (Richlin 1992, 153, contrasting Catullus with, e.g., Martial and Pliny, whose “*apologiae* [sc., for their scurrilous verse] leave the author uncomfortably on the defensive” (5, generally 2–13). See further chap. 2 of this volume, esp. discussion of c. 16.

5. Quinn 1970, 110.

6. Per Fitzgerald 1995, 4, quoted in the introduction.

7. The value of such conversation, *sermo*, to Romans is clear from reactions to its absence, e.g., in exile. See, e.g., Cic. *Att.* 3.12.3 (“I am even now lying in the same place, without any conversation, without a thought in my head”; *ego etiam nunc eodem in loco iaceo sine sermone ullo, sine cogitatione ulla*) with Beard 2002, 133: Cicero “insist[s] on the centrality of *sermo* to full civic life (its absence signifying social death)”; and Ov. *Tr.* 1.3.69, 5.7.61, and *Ep.* 2.4.11–12, among others, with Stevens 2009a and Grebe 2010.

8. It is hard to notice, e.g., that Quinn called the poem’s situation an “inspection,” etymologically “a close viewing.” Sensorial anthropology suggests that “to dismiss such metaphors as mere ‘figures of speech’ would be to recur to a theory of mind/body dualism which is no longer tenable” (Howes 1991, 169–70 [drawing on Lock and Scheper-Hughes 1987] and 167–91 generally). On privilege afforded to written language, see seminally Derrida (1967) 1976.

9. We might compare Catullus’s treatment of “actual” objects like napkins and poetry books; see Nappa 2001, 121–32, after Griffin’s discussion of “significant objects” in Homer (1980, 1–49).

10. For desire for another person’s lover, cf. c. 10 and the epigrams centering around “rivals” for a lover’s affections (e.g., Caelius in cc. 69–71 and 77, on

which see Skinner 2003, 69–79). Arguably other kinds of intimate contact are desired in, e.g., c. 50, discussed later in this chapter and in chap. 3.

11. On (*im*)*pu*dicitia, cf. the important contemporary formulation by Cicero (*Cael.* 6), making clear that this is a question of *public* shame that is, therefore, subject to debate. See further chap. 4 on c. 68(a), with Skinner 2003, 143–72.

12. On elision in Latin poetry, see above all Soubiran 1966, who treats monosyllables on 387–435, concluding that “we know how they [sc. ancient readers] realized it [sc. “elision”]: before a long [sc. syllable], elision seems to have been imposed. Before a short [sc. syllable], they tried to a certain degree to regard the thousand nuances of the phonetics of spoken Latin, allowing the coexistence of long synaloephe (prosodic hiatus) in cases of close connection between these words, and—rather more often—elision as such” (“nous savons comment ils l’ont résolu: devant longue, l’élision a paru s’imposer. Devant brève, ils ont, dans une certaine mesure, tenté de respecter les mille nuances de la phonétique du latin parlé, en laissant coexister la synalèphe longue [hiatus prosodique] en cas de liasion étroite des deux mots, et—bien plus souvent—l’élision proprement dite” [433]). Although other monosyllables were subject to various restrictions on their complete elision in classical authors, “only the monosyllables *me*, *te*, *se* . . . avoided these restrictions to some degree, and their elision remained the rule” (“seuls les monosyllables *me*, *te*, *se* . . . échappent en quelque mesure à ces interdicts, et leur élision demeure majoritaire”). Since there can be no question of hiatus between *te* and *ac* in 6.16, we may therefore be reasonably certain that its resolution was via elision as such.

13. Cf. Tarquinius’s command to Lucretia: “be quiet” (*tace*; Livy 1.58: “Be silent, Lucretia,” he said; “I am Sextus Tarquinius; a sword is in my hand; you’ll die if you say anything”; “*Tace, Lucretia*” inquit; “*Sex. Tarquinius sum; ferrum in manu est; moriere, si emiseris vocem*”). The story of Lucretia’s refusal to obey allowed late Republican Romans to imagine their republic founded on liberty: the topic, and/or the *uerba propria*, are at least less shameful than the deed; see Oliensis 2009, 82–89. Catullus may not be so serious in c. 6; on sexual violence as a source of humor in Roman literary culture, see chap. 2, with sources there.

14. Cf. Gaiser 2009, 91, concluding that “now we know what *lepidus* means.”

15. Marks 1978, 9; cf. 1: synaesthesia thus “expresses . . . a relationship between features of experience that properly belong to different senses.” Historians distinguish two kinds: clinical, which is the pathology; and literary, the linguistic displacement of tropes from one sense to another (Marks 1978, 1: “*verbal* expression of analogies among different sense qualities”; this may be referred to by clinicians as “pseudosynaesthesia”; so Baron-Cohen and Harrison 1997, 8–11). See Gross 2002; Paissa 1995; Hadermann 1992; Tempesti 1991; Vinge 1975, 166–79; O’Malley 1957; and Ullmann 1957, 266–89. For synaesthesia in the classics, see Stevens 2008a; Segal 1977; and Stanford 1936, 47–61 (with points in his 1942, 26–30). Catrein doubts whether there is any clinical synaesthesia reported in ancient literature (2003, 14).

16. I am reminded of the charged half-light of *Ov. Am.* 1.5.3–8.
17. V. 7 may be linked to a crucial line from c. 101, v. 4, “[so that] I address in vain mute ash” (*et mutam nequiquam alloquerer cinerem*), where again there is desire for absent speech. The fact that these two very different poems could have anything so precisely in common is, I think, suggestive of the depth of Catullus’s interest in silence. See discussion of c. 101 in chap. 5.
18. Cf. Krostenko 2001, 250: “Praising something or someone *ad caelum* ‘to the sky,’ a common hyperbole, implied particularly ebullient praise” (comparing Cic. *De Or.* 3.146); c. 6 would seem to undermine poetry’s “vaunt” indeed. On the same problem, cf. Skinner 2003, 34, cited in n. 1.
19. For *argutatio* and *inambulatio* as legal terms, see esp. Tracy 1969; c. 6 may thus satirize elite public discourse, which was rich with legal and rhetorical terms.
20. Sight was of course also important in ancient literary culture, for example playing a part in certain theories of how to prepare for recitation; see Yates 1966, 1–26.
21. The poem’s structure has been described variously: cf. Wray 2001a, 153 [6 + 5 + 6]; Thomson 1998, 221 [5 + 9 + 3]; and Bardón 1943, 15 [3 + 8 + 6].
22. The centering is also suggestive of the usefulness of rereading the “triplet” in terms of c. 6, as against reading c. 6 in terms of cc. 5 and 7; see further discussion later in this chapter.
23. On poems involving the death of Catullus’s brother and absolute silence, see chaps. 4 and 5.
24. As Gaisser notes, “the language has a strong erotic cast” (2009, 139; after Quinn 1970, 238–39); see generally Gaisser 2009, 139–43. Hurley leaves open the question of “the poem’s unmistakable homoeroticism” in which “friendship and romantic or sexual love are not necessarily separate realms” (2004, 59–63), referring (62) to Sedgwick’s concept of “homosocial desire” (1985): readers are prompted to “query where on the continuum his desire for Licinius lies” (Gaisser 2009, 63). On c. 50, see also Stevens, forthcoming, and further discussion in chap. 3.
25. Vv. 11–13. Catullus’s and Calvus’s shared status is ambiguous; see Segal 1970, with Janan 1994, 52: “Key terms in the poem . . . signify both within a literary and an erotic context.”
26. The suggestion that Catullus is speaking out of envy, or even that Flavius is keeping something from him, may be strengthened by comparison with c. 15. C. 15’s first line includes an exact parallel with c. 6, when Catullus says to Aurelius: “I entrust to you *me and my boyfriend*” (*commendo tibi me ac meos amores*). This parallels 6.16, “tell me! I want *you and your girlfriend*” (*dic nobis: uolo te ac tuos amores*), including elision between accusative personal pronoun and conjunction *ac* at the same point in the line (set in regular type in the Latin quotations here). Cf. Fitzgerald 1995, 52: in “6, in many ways the reverse of 15, we find the same situation with the roles reversed and the poet firmly in

control. . . . The poet can produce elegance even out of the silence that betrays the inelegance of his friend," a friend "whose crude sexuality consigns him to a silence that is itself blatant." In other words, the irony of c. 15 is that its "dedicatee" seems to be the same Aurelius pilloried in c. 16 as being unworthy of reading; see discussion in chap. 2.

27. See Morgan 1977.

28. There is some reason to wonder whether *ineptiarum* implies that Flavius is to be imagined as performing oral sex on his girlfriend. In the Roman imagination, this would count as his being penetrated by her. Cf. the opening of c. 8, where Catullus urges himself to "stop being so stupid" (v. 1: *desinas ineptire*) in wishing to continue his relationship with Lesbia. See further discussion, chap. 2, nn. 21 and 22.

29. Cf. the enclosed space that concludes Hor. *Carm.* 1.9 (vv. 20–23), with Stevens, forthcoming.

30. Throughout I have rendered *febriculosum*, in combination with *scortum*, somewhat freely as "skinny little." A recent preference, endorsed by Green 2005 ad loc. after Wray 2001a, is "consumptive." What matters is that the girlfriend is a special sort of attractive: to Flavius explicitly, to Catullus by extension. Thomson notes that "Plaut. *Cist.* 406 implies that *febriculosa* was used of common (low-grade) prostitutes" (1998, 222, following Morgan 1977). For *scortum*, cf. 10.3, where the unusual *scortillum* appears (Thomson 1998, 232: "a *hapax eiremenon*"). Skinniness and silence together may suggest death; see Montiglio 2000 and my chaps. 4 and 5, as well as discussion of c. 51 and its model, Sappho's c. 31, in chap. 7.

31. This interpretation would be in line with the notion that literature in antiquity was generally read aloud, and complicated by Catullus's writerliness. See the introduction.

32. On the value of subjective approaches to ancient materials, see Stevens, forthcoming, and Hallett and Van Nortwick 1997.

33. Wray 2001a, 152.

34. Thomson 1998, 221.

35. Esp. 5.5–6: "when for us brief light has set, we must sleep one everlasting night" (*nobis cum semel occidit brevis lux / nox est perpetua una dormienda*). One suspects that these poems are beloved, too, because of how their brevity, relatively clear syntax, and relatively passionate but yet decorous language have lent to their use in Latin classrooms.

36. Wray 2001a, 145.

37. Wray 2001a, 159.

38. I would say that such a reading also mistakes c. 5, whose own point is to reject "as worth only a penny" just such an imposition of an external system of values on a personal experience; experiential subjects are exhorted instead to free their experience from arbitrary cultural limits, especially since an inevitable natural limit will be brought by death. As in c. 6, so in c. 5 do sense

perceptions—in its case, the kisses—become a matter less of objective scrutiny than of intersubjective experience, meaningful and valuable as tokens exchanged between the speaker and his lover.

39. The readers pilloried in c. 16, Furius and Aurelius, are mistaken to think that “kiss poems” imply unmanly behavior by their author. In Catullus’s view, to impose external standards thus is stupid misreading; see discussion in chap. 2.

40. Fitzgerald thus writes that the poet in c. 6 “is teasing” (1995, 52).

41. See esp. Krostenko 2001.

42. In this connection, the study of silence in Catullus may help to confirm Skinner’s suggestion that the “elegiac *libellus*,” i.e., cc. 65–116, represents Catullus’s withdrawal from Callimachean artistry or, perhaps, even from poetry altogether: “The silence following 116, despite threats of added retaliation, makes poetic failure a retrospective issue in the collection, insofar as lines 5 and 6 point to the ultimate fruitlessness of the Callimachean artistic project announced in the dedicatory poem 65” (2003, 179). In chaps. 3 and following, I argue that a feeling of “poetic failure” is indeed implicit in certain poems as part of Catullus’s poetics of silence.

43. This is almost certainly Cornelius Nepos, the biographer and historian, who like Catullus was a Transpadane; see Thomson 1998, 197; and Wiseman 1985, 107–14; and cf. Wiseman 2007b. Cicero disparaged the “new poetry.” Later Roman poets seem not to have specialized quite so much in “trifles,” imitating the polish of Catullus’s work while also looking to Greek models other than Callimachus.

44. On “model readers” and “authors,” see Eco 1990 and 1979.

45. Cf. the woman in c. 8—probably Lesbia—who “once wouldn’t resist” but “now no longer wants” what Catullus wants (vv. 7 and 9: *quae tu uolebas nec puella nolebat* / . . . / *nunc iam illa non uult*).

46. As W. A. Johnson has shown, a wide range of ancient sources imply that the reading aloud of difficult texts was a leisure activity (2000, 615–18); for example, it could be “tak[en] for granted . . . that, for the weary traveler, attending (and presumably discussing) a difficult philosophical dialogue is a relaxing and refreshing way to pass the time” (618, on Plut. *Mor.* 1107F). It may be, then, that we are not completely well equipped to understand Catullus’s use of *laboriosis*. Cf. Janan 1994, 39–40: “The double-entendre [of *laboriosis*] leaves us guessing whether Catullus considered Nepos’s *Chronica* a polished *chef-d’oeuvre* or a yawn.”

47. The command itself is prosaic in diction, as if to capture the peri-poetic moment of giving a gift of poetry. Cf. c. 68(a), a more truly poetic “dedication” to a poem that follows, with discussion in chap. 4.

48. This feeling of close association depended on similarity of background including location (as noted, both Cornelius and Catullus, among others, were Transpadane) and “class”: “The possibility [was] that Catullus’s achievement

could be denigrated by being treated simply as a Greek literary production. . . . It was perhaps precisely the embeddedness of literary culture within the manifestations of elite status that mattered. Without it, Catullus's learning makes him look very like another class of person who would possess the kind of knowledge on display in poem 64: the professional *grammatici*. They too could amass great wealth and reputation and often wrote as well as taught poetry. But their background was entirely different, for they were often expensive slaves or freedmen" (Feldherr 2007b, 106).

49. This is well emphasized by Wray 2001a, 152.

50. See Ahl 1984.

51. See Skinner 1989.

52. Cf. Krostenko 2001, 236–37, on c. 43: c. 43's Ameana "evidently has not the gift of saying the right thing that is part and parcel of attractiveness. Much the same is true of Flavius's girlfriend."

53. There may be detected here shades of Diotima's description of mystical ascent in Plato's *Symposium*; see briefly chap. 3, near n. 44, in connection with c. 36. For discussion of *Symposium* in relation to Catullus, see Janan 1994, 12–15.

54. After Barthes 1975.

55. For other "sublimities" in poetry and silence, see esp. the death poems, discussed in chaps. 4 and 5.

56. Gerard Manley Hopkins: "the darling child of speech, of lips and spoken utterance: it must be spoken." Cf. poetry's characteristic "resistance to paraphrase": although able to be reproduced, and therefore strictly "allographic," it cannot be completely restated and so is more meaningfully "autographic"; see Goodman 1978, 121: essential is the extent to which an art "is amenable to notation," plus 127–73 on "notation."

57. There is here a possible reading of poetry as parasitic on discourse, even infectious: the difficult poem would thus be figured as a disease like a retrovirus. From this perspective, language would be not "fossil poetry" but a kind of laboratory culture in which the poetic virus may be raised, and we the "poetry dish." This reading could help to revivify a tension in language use and reception between recognition of past forms, language recycled, and novelty as it is feared to verge on out of control. Should we be pleased at our capacity to remember, even to memorize, something that *insists* on being remembered?

Chapter 2. Orality and Sexualized Silence in Cc. 5, 7, 74, 80, 88, 116, and 16

1. Likewise the "girlfriend," *puella*, is conventionally identified as Lesbia, but she is not named in these poems.

2. See Fitzgerald 1995, 35–38 and 42–44, with 252–53n24: "The evidence for this seems good enough that a suspicion of double entendre should enter the mind of the reader, but this does not mean that the whole poem becomes

an elaborate allegory in which every statement has a specific sexual transaction." Fitzgerald cites R. F. Thomas 1993; Jocelyn 1980 (arguing against: "a suggestion of indecency in the poems . . . is a thoroughly wrong-headed notion" [422]); Nadeau 1980; Giangrande 1975; and Genovese 1974, to which we may add Hooper 1985 and Adams 1982, 32–33; the idea is generally attributed to Poliziano, available in Gaisser 2007, 305–7.

3. See discussion of c. 36, chap. 3.

4. I do not wish to limit the meaning of *passer* to "penis" or to limit the meaning of these poems to the sexual. (But see further discussion in this chapter for a possible sexual double entendre in c. 7.) It is possible, e.g., that if *passer* is symbolic of anything, it stands for a poem or poems. Ingleheart thus argues, "working from Martial's references to Catullus's *passer* and Catullus's use of Sappho fr. 1 in Catullus 2," that the polymetric poems were organized by their author as a single volume (2003, 562–64, after W. R. Johnson 1982, referring to *The Sparrow* as such by that name). Cf. M. Johnson 2003a and Skinner 1981.

5. Richlin 1992, 150, discussing c. 116: "In 116.8 *nostris* = weapons = poems = phallus. This identification in turn helps to explain another facet of Catullus's oral imagery: his focus on the mouths of his beloved and his enemies, and the way in which he degrades those of his enemies." On c. 116 and other poems in which "mouths are degraded" by being filled so as to be silent, see further discussion in this chapter.

6. On c. 5 and c. 7 together, see Segal 1968.

7. Here I have found especially useful Nappa 2001, 45–57. My reading is in part an attempt to address the situation Nappa describes in writing that "Catullus' anxiety over rumors and *invidia* has not been given the attention it deserves" (53).

8. On the "evil eye," see Wray 2001a, 143–59.

9. In each poem the consequence—"envy," "evil tongue"—appears in the same line, v. 12.

10. There is almost certainly an economic metaphor at work here. For economic language as a language of friendship in Latin, see Verboven 2002.

11. On oral activity in c. 7, see Bertman 1978.

12. There is a lovely juxtaposition between c. 7, whose night is twinklingly alive with lovers and watchful stars (they approximate how we overhear Catullus—it is truly as if any lovers' story at all could become poetry), and c. 5, in which the shadowless, sunlit day contextualizes activity to be identified with life, while night shades quietly through sleep into death. This aspect of c. 5 connects to c. 101, discussed in chap. 5. Cf. Lucretius's suggestion that civilized humankind fears night and the dark irrationally, while primitive humankind rationally feared a very different kind of oral activity, i.e., being eaten alive by animals (5.992–93). I am reminded of Othello's famous speech while stealing in to kill Desdemona, including the line "let me not name it to you, you chaste

stars”; I investigate the relationship between *Othello* 5.1–22 and Catullus cc. 5 and 7 elsewhere.

13. This is the Battus from whom Catullus’s chief poetic model, Callimachus, claimed descent. Catullus might also expect readers to know that a different Battus was turned to stone by Hermes after breaking his promise to be silent about Hermes’s theft of Apollo’s cattle.

14. Fitzgerald 1995, 257n10; cf. Adams 1982, 63–64. This would resonate with the possibility that cc. 2’s and 3’s *passer* also symbolizes “penis” (see the earlier discussion), and likewise with the use of the word *telum*, literally “missile,” to mean the same thing (see further discussion of c. 116 later in the chapter).

15. Cf. Mart. 2.50 and 11.95.

16. Fitzgerald 1995, 64–72; he refers to Bakhtin 1981, 285–88, on the monologic nature of poetry—from our perspective monologue would be enforced by forcibly imposed oral sex. We might wonder whether poetry in general “silences” us; this possibility is considered later in relation to c. 16 and then in various forms in chaps. 4 through 7.

17. Richlin 1992, 149, citing there cc. 74 and 16 and discussing 116 (through her p. 150).

18. Richlin 1992, esp. 26–29, quoted material from 26.

19. Richlin 1992, 150. Catullus therefore “likens[s] the mouth to excretory orifices also used sexually” (151).

20. C. A. Williams 2010, 218–24. Williams provides valuable bibliography at 396nn202 and 203, and comments specific to silence and oral sexuality at 367n38. Also useful is Skinner 2005, 192–239; and Parker 1997, 47–65 (“The Teratogenic Grid,” including 50: “Oral sex, however greatly desired, is already constructed as an anomalous activity”).

21. Parker 1997, 51: “It is clear from the Roman sources that cunnilingus is viewed as a man being used by a woman and corresponds to a man being used vaginally” (citing Cic. *Dom.* 25, 47, and 83, “where Clodia uses Cloelius as an oral dildo”). Despite this, however, and the apparently shared connotation of an “unclean mouth,” fellatio seems to differ somewhat from cunnilingus in cultural conception. The phallocentrism of Latin literary culture is well known; see Richlin 1992 passim and the essays in Hallett and Skinner 1997. I cannot completely agree with C. A. Williams when he suggests that “fellatio and cunnilinctus [*sic*] were thus understood as two aspects of a single, repellent phenomenon: two sides of one repulsive coin. Both acts dirty the mouth, and a man who performed one could easily be thought guilty of the other” (2010, 221). Williams refers to Mart. 12.59.10 and 3.88; elsewhere (403n239) to Gal. (Kühn 12:249): “among those who perform oral sex, we are more disgusted by those who perform cunnilinctus [*sic*] than by those who perform fellatio” (ἀλλὰ κατὰ τῶν αἰσχροῦργῶν μᾶλλον βδελυττόμεθα τοὺς φοινικίζοντας τῶν λεσβιαζόντων).

Williams's use of Galen may be unjustified; it is not clear that φοινικίζεσθαι, listed by the LSJ as meaning "imitate the Phoenicians," refers specifically to cunnilingus. The LSJ adds the meaning "unnatural vice," citing only this Galen and Lucian *Pseudol.* 28. Λεσβιάζεσθαι is not to be found but may perhaps be understood as connoting cunnilingus, given ancient ideas about the most famous Lesbian's—Sappho's—preferences.

22. Cunnilingus is only arguably implied; see *ineptiarum* in c. 6 and *ineptire* in c. 8, as noted in chap. 1, n. 28. Cf. Mart. 9, in which a prostitute, Galla, "doesn't charge so much [sc., the 10 *aureoli* that her 'client' Aeschylus has paid] for giving head. For what, then? For keeping quiet" (v. 4: *non fellat tanti Galla. quid ergo? tacet*). C. A. Williams argues that "there would be no reason for Aeschylus to pay her off if she were fellating him; he must be buying her silence because he is performing cunnilingus [sic]" (2010, 397n214). We could therefore think of cunnilingus as causing a silence surpassing in seriousness that caused by fellatio: "Being exposed as a *cunnilingus* could shame a man" (idem, comparing Juv. 9.3–4). Thought-provoking in this connection is Nappa 2001, 85–105. An alternative interpretation would seem to be that Aeschylus failed to perform.

23. By contrast, *fellare*, "to perform fellatio," appears only once (59.1–2): Rufa, the wife of Menenius, fellates Rufulus. On Catullus's irrumation by Memmius, see Thomson 1998, 277 ad 8.9–10 ("not to be taken literally, of course") and 10 ("*trabs*, here = *penis*, has a wide figurative application"); Fitzgerald 1995, 68–70. I am not convinced that Catullus means for his readers to take such images only figuratively; see esp. Nappa 2001, 45–57, on the literal force of Catullan sexual insult, with further discussion later in this chapter.

24. On the Gellius poems as a group, see Hurley 2004, 115–22.

25. On cc. 6 and 80, see Wray 2001a, 156–60.

26. For the tone, cf. the parallel between 6.4, *nescioquid febriculosi*, and 80.5, *nescio quid certe est*: the indeterminacy is ironical, a fiction on the poet's part that allows him to play out the line a bit longer. Cf. Hurley 2004, 120–21: "The act of eavesdropping necessarily entails some guilt—we know we aren't *supposed* to be listening—but in this case, the guilt is mitigated by the poet's good humour. He does not make his audience complicit in a vicious character-assassination; instead, his aim seems only to make Gellius blush—and readers laugh." See the discussion of Catullus's "Écouteurist Reader" later in this chapter.

27. On the red-white contrast, see discussion of cc. 63 and 64 in chap. 5.

28. Thomson 1998, 507 ad vv. 1–2; Quinn 1970, 415 ad vv. 1–2.

29. On the "lover's pallor," see Curran 1966; cf. Mart. 1.77 (with Howell 1980 ad loc.) and 9.92.11; I owe these epigrams to C. A. Williams 2010, 397n213.

30. We may think of the cosmic forces symbolized by Venus and Mars while he lolls, open-mouthed, across her lap at Lucr. 1.31–37.

31. Richlin 1992, 145, does identify c. 80 as a kind of *irrumatio*: "The description of Gellius's penchant for fellatio in 80 amounts to an irrumation of him by the poet." On this poetic maneuver, see n. 76 for this chapter.

32. On “manliness” as impenetrability vs. “softness” and/as effeminacy, see C. A. Williams 2010, 139–44; Walters 1997, 29–43; Richlin 1992, variously, e.g., 92.

33. Cf. Wray 2001a, 158: Gellius is “read as already having been silenced by submitting orally to Victor (irrumation silences, and Poem 74 has already accused Gellius of silencing his own uncle in precisely this manner).”

34. The diminutive *labella*, “little lips” (as opposed to *labra*, “lips”), may be positive or negative; cf. English, in which “those rosy little lips of yours” admits the same range of tone.

35. Although Catullus’s capacity for speech is marked as masculine, in some strains of thought silence or reticence characterizes masculinity or *Romanitas* as against a loquacity associated with “feminine,” “eastern” luxury. See, e.g., Cato the Elder’s terse pronouncement of Roman oratorical practice, in implicit contrast to the prolix Greek: “Keep the matter in mind, the words will come” (*rem tene, uerba sequentur*); and cf. Aeneas’s famous “taciturnity” with Feeney 1983.

36. Is the poet somehow virtuously colored, in contrast to his whitened subject? Cf. c. 103, “not caring what Caesar’s color is,” while c. 57 yet participates in an ordinary attack on him for unmanly activity; and cf. the green that Catullus omits from his adaptation of Sappho’s 31 (c. 51), discussed in chap. 7.

37. Fitzgerald 1995, 260n44 writes (after Curran 1966, 26) that “*emulgere* (milk), *serum* (whey), and *labra* (‘tub,’ as well as ‘lips’) reduce Victor to an animal.” This would likely be a cow or a goat, the latter of which especially would have strong negative connotations (as in cc. 69–71, in which Catullus attacks a rival, Marcus Caelius Rufus, on the basis of his overpowering goatlike odor; and as in c. 22, in which Suffenus’s poetry paints him into a goat-milking corner, as we will see in chap. 3). Milk drinking seems to have been thought of as appropriate only for children and otherwise as inappropriate, even barbaric.

38. There may be a slight pun in “broken open,” whose Latin *rupta* recalls *rupes*, “rock” or “cliff”: Victor would thus be exceptionally hard and rough, in contrast with Gellius’s soft activity.

39. The poet himself is in a similarly diminished position elsewhere: e.g., c. 8, an enjoiner for “poor Catullus [to] stop being stupid” about love (*miser Catulle, desinas ineptire*), perhaps to stop performing oral sex on Lesbia (see chap. 1, n. 28); and cf. c. 11, discussed briefly in n. 40. As a poet Catullus has the most power in speech, even as he elsewhere recognizes limitations to his being-in-language.

40. The repetition and the image of messy ejaculation are enhanced by the hypermetricism linking v. 19 to v. 20, where *omnium* spills over into *ilia*. (It is common in this context to compare c. 58, in which Lesbia “shucks [i.e., masturbates?] the descendants of great-hearted Remus”; v. 5: *glubit magnanimi Remi nepotes*.) Similarity to c. 80 is also found in the conclusion of c. 11, moving from that sexual description to a simile of great delicacy, in which Catullus “fell, the

blame hers, like a distant / field's flower, after it has been / touched by a plow passing by" (*qui illius culpa cecidit uelut prati / ultimi flos, praterente postquam / tactus aratro est*; vv. 22–24, between the first two of which is hypermetricism); see the brief discussion in chap. 4. That simile resonates with the floral image opening c. 80, and both may be linked to a statement in c. 62, put into the mouths of girls singing at a marriage, likewise describing a nubile girl's virginity as a flower (vv. 39–47). For interconnections among the long poems and the rest of the collection, see chaps. 4 through 7, and Miller 1994, 107–19. For Catullus's feminized construction of masculine identity, see esp. Skinner 1997, and further chaps. 6 and 7.

41. For a story about storytelling, see Stevens 2009b.

42. Cf. MacKendrick 2001; Kurzon 1997; and Sells 1994.

43. Cf. Gaiser 2009, 96: "The epigram is a carefully constructed obscene joke exploiting the fact that the Egyptian god Harpocrates was a watchword for silence since he was represented with a finger to his mouth."

44. Cf. Hurley 2004, 117: "Presumably, Gellius' uncle in poem 74 is so humiliated by his wife's misbehaviour that, instead of divorcing her or seeking punishment against Gellius ('manly' courses of action), he will suffer it in silence. . . . He is so passive, Catullus implies, that he wouldn't speak up even if Gellius orally raped *him*. The joke, of course, is that Uncle wouldn't be able to speak with his mouth full." That this is a "joke," representing a sort of humor imitated by later authors (see chap. 1, n. 4) says a great deal about Roman humor; see Richlin 1992 and Skinner 1982, and cf. discussion later in this chapter of c. 16 (which Richlin describes as likewise "humorous [in] intent" [146]).

45. See chap. 3.

46. We could compare Catullus's self-deprecatory poems, e.g., cc. 8, 10, 28.

47. See Gaiser 2009, 96: "Catullus has apparently coined *perdepsuit* ('thoroughly banged') in line 3; it is a compound of the intensive prefix *per* and *depso* ('knead'), a word considered offensive but not actually obscene" (citing Adams 1982, 153–54).

48. "Any offspring produced by Gellius and the wife of his *patruus* will still belong to Gellius's agnatic lineage (unlike the offspring of an affair between Gellius and the wife of his mother's brother); nevertheless, Gellius's paternal uncle cannot even display the severity expected from a male in that role." For these insights I am grateful to an anonymous reader of my manuscript. On Roman attitudes toward adultery, see C. Edwards 1993, 34–62.

49. We might compare Cicero's defense of Caelius, including the feeling that such stringent virtue is no longer to be found even in books (*Cael.* 40).

50. Cf. Janan 1994, 47, discussing how "Freud outlines a series of metaphorical transformations that lead to the equation 'penis' = 'baby.'"

51. Catullus does make clear elsewhere the high value he imputes to faithfulness in friendships, e.g., c. 76. Likewise he reacts negatively to perceived unfaithfulness, e.g., Lesbia's affair with Caelius as depicted in cc. 69–71.

52. The positive aspects of the metaphor are emphasized if, as is possible, the Cornelius addressed in c. 102 (v. 3) is the dedicatee of the collection as in c. 1, “but the name is common” (Thomson 1998, 539 ad loc.). See further M. J. Edwards 1990.

53. The charge of incest is furthered in c. 89 (Gellius is “thin” because, it is implied, he is exhausted by intercourse and fellatio with mother, sister, uncle, and other female relatives: he “touches nothing unless it’s not permitted to be touched” [*nihil attingat, nisi quod fas tangere non est*; v. 5]), in c. 90 (a “magus” ought to be fathered by Gellius and his own mother, on what Catullus describes as a Persian model), and in c. 91 (Catullus would have thought that Lesbia was safe from Gellius since his and Catullus’s friendship, however intimate, was not on the order of blood relation). These examples do not contribute materially to our primary interest in silence.

54. Richlin 1992, 149, citing MacLeod 1973 as “most cogen[t].”

55. MacLeod calls c. 116 an “inverted dedication” (1973, 308). Cf. Thomson 1998, 554; and Quinn 1970, 455. Skinner argues that the poem is a natural starting point for a first rereading of the collection, in which by definition the scroll would be unwound, and the poems therefore read, in reverse (2003, 20–28, with 124 and 179: “With a corrective reading in reverse, many positional anomalies in the elegiac books disappear. . . . As we worked through the epigrams, we perceived a number of cases where a later epigram spells out the prefigurements of an earlier one. Thus the silence following 116 . . . makes poetic failure a retrospective issue in the collection”); after Holzberg 2002, 209–11. Thomson feels that “whether this poem, with its reference to ‘Battiades’ (Callimachus) in l. 2 (cf. 65.16), is placed at the end of the elegiac epigrams as a sort of counterpoise to poem 65 at the beginning, is a matter of speculation” (1998, 554).

56. See Wiseman 1985, 183–210, who contends on this basis that “Shackleton Bailey has very plausibly suggested that [Catullus] might be identical with the [author of comedy] Valerius mentioned by Cicero. . . . If we have read poem 116 right, it is exactly what we should expect” (179).

57. Thomson 1998, 556, citing Cic. *Orat.* 161 “on the withdrawal of this usage from the capital to the provinces.” The seeming rusticity of this usage would fit with what Skinner suggests is the *libellus*’s image of Catullus withdrawing from the life of the city to Verona in parallel to a return to epic poetics (2003, 20–28). The metrical usage is found much more frequently in the poetry of Lucretius and Cicero, both of whom make greater use of archaisms.

58. Green feels that this is special pleading, and “find[s] the earlier consensus, that here we have one more piece of evidence that Catullus was not responsible for the final ordering of his corpus, a good deal more persuasive” (2005, 270). Romulus and Remus would serve nicely to figure the family issues pervading the Gellius poems: warring twins, they are said to have been born of a vestal virgin’s rape (by Mars?) and then raised by a she-wolf (*lupa*), which, however, might be a veiled reference to a “prostitute” (Livy 1.4).

59. Adams 1982, 17 (citing *Priapea* 9.14 and 55.4), 19 (citing eadem, Justin 38.1.9, Mart. 11.78.6), and 20 (suggesting, as a parallel to Justin, Plaut. *Cas.* 909, with *gladium*). “No single word for a weapon seems to have become a banal term for the penis in Latin, but the frequency of *ad hoc* metaphors both in Greek and Latin shows that the sexual symbolism of weapons was instantly recognizable in ancient society. Words for weapons lent themselves readily to risqué jokes” (19).

60. See the section “*Irrumatio* and *rumor*.”

61. See Porter 2009. For silence in this connection, see recently McNeill 2010.

62. See chaps. 4 through 7.

63. Richlin 1992 is especially illuminating on the poem generally; she cites (248n9) Fehling 1974 and Buchheit 1974 as “together (each with modifications) constitut[ing] a complete reading of the poem. Fehling correctly adduces the theme of punitive rape and the idea of friendly insult; Buchheit, besides providing a lengthy catalog of the critical literature on 16, argues that the poem is a sort of literary allegory, all the sexual elements representing ways of writing and reading poetry.” Other studies of c. 16 are cited as appropriate in the following notes. For sex as metaphorical for literature and vice versa, see Fredrick 1997, 172–93, on lovers metaphorized as texts, thanks in part to their shared feature of “skin”; cf. MacKendrick 2004.

64. Translators have attempted to render c. 16’s first and last lines in various ways. With a target language like English, a translator must feel that certain meanings are reserved for suprasegmental features like intonation or even nonverbal elements like gesture. This is not to suggest that Catullus mimes the action but only to keep open the question of how physical is the image. The lines were imitated in antiquity (cf. *Priapea* 35.5, “you’ll be ass-fucked and throat-fucked” [*pedicaberis irrumarberisque*]), and the poem was taken to justify a distinction between inappropriate poems and proprietous poet (e.g., Plin. *Ep.* 4.1). On c. 16’s reception, see further Gaisser 2009, 170–74 (Mart. 1.35), 179–80, and 182–84 (Pontano’s *Parthenopaeus* and its successors, who “played endless changes on the ideas of poem 16” [182]), and 204–5 (showing how “concern about obscenity undoubtedly affected the reception of poems 16 and 32”).

65. See Wray 2001a, 60: “There is no reason to think that any elite Roman male was exempted from observations on his social performance, and conclusions about his manhood, of the type that Catullus claims in Poem 16 to have received from Furius and Aurelius,” and 185–86 (after Selden 1992): “the Priapic threat on which it begins and ends . . . performatively exposes its two victims, and the reader of the collection as well, to the penetrative ferocity of the aggressive acts it names. And yet it is at the center of this poem that Catullus lays claim, astonishingly, to a personal purity of life. . . . In writing those lines, Catullus may have had before his eyes, and expected his reader to see as well, the most conspicuous example known to antiquity of a holy poet who wrote

dirty poems,” Archilochus (generally 167–86). Cf. Hurley 2004, 53: c. 16 presents an “extremely sexually aggressive Catullus” whose actions are, like those of “Roman men regularly,” in doubt (generally 52–55).

66. Aurelius is pilloried also in c. 21, called both “gluttonous” (*pater esuritionum*; v. 1) and “blatant about it” (v. 5: *nec clam*): he desires to have anal sex with Catullus’s boyfriend (v. 4: *pedicare cupis meos amores*). Thus he deserves the poetic justice Catullus will dish out: an imposition of fellatio by Catullus that will satisfy even his appetite (v. 9: *tangam te prior irrumatione*). This would also silence Aurelius. C. 21 makes this clear by implied contrast: Catullus feels that he cannot keep quiet about how Aurelius is going too far in teaching the boyfriend bad habits (vv. 9–11: *atque id si faceres, tacerem; / nunc ipsum id doleo, quod esurire / a te mi puer et sitire discet*); the threat implies that Catullus will control Aurelius’s mouth and speech. C. 21 delivers on its own threat: insofar as the “Aurelius” of the poem does not respond, “Catullus” is the only one who can and does speak.

67. Some studies of such sexual humor are noted in n. 44.

68. Thomson 1998, 250. Cf. Janan 1994, 45: “*Irrumare* and *pedicare* refer to homosexual sex acts—but they can also mean as little as ‘go to hell.’” In general I agree with Nappa 2001, esp. 90, who argues for the literal, physical, and sexual force of the threats.

69. On children in Roman sexuality, see C. A. Williams 2010, 20–29, 69–78, and 203–8; cf. Janan 1994, 46–50.

70. See C. A. Williams 2010, 90–94 and 139–45.

71. Similar points may be made about the evaluative term *pious*. See Fitzgerald 1995, 249n1: “The distinction here is between what is appropriate to the bard or epic poet (*pium poetam ipsum*, 5–6) and what is appropriate to the writer of *versiculi*”; and Richlin 1992, 12–13 and 145–47. I would say that both Fitzgerald and Richlin deny the “autobiographical” aspect of c. 16 too strongly, for we know from elsewhere that Catullus clearly and, it seems, unironically considers himself *pious*: “If a man has any pleasure in recalling his earlier good deeds, since he thinks of himself as *pious*, as not having sullied any sacred trust” (76.1–3: *siqua recordanti benefacta priora uoluptas / est homini, cum se cogitat esse pium, / nec sanctam uiolasse fidem*). Those lines also complicate Fitzgerald’s feeling (1995, 110–13) that readers like Skinner (1981, 84–85) and Quinn (1972, 280) are mistaken in interpreting a poem like c. 50 “as a description of the creative process in which emotion recollected in tranquility transforms the ephemeral into the enduring” (111). “Tranquility,” maybe not: Catullus does not claim the sort of Wordsworthian perspective to which Fitzgerald alludes. But the act of “recollection” is explicit here (*recordanti*). Catullus’s disinterest in epic is real and involves its requisite displacements; see the discussion in chaps. 4 through 7.

72. What seems to be at stake in Furius’s and Aurelius’s alleged criticism of Catullus is *not* specifically any sexual interaction with another man or boy but rather its insufficient aggression *regardless* of the partner’s biological gender.

73. See Gaisser 2009, 47–51 (“Acknowledging the Persona”), esp. 50: “In 16 the speaker acknowledges the existence of the persona and lets us think that we are seeing the real self of Catullus the poet. . . . His mask is still firmly in place and we will never know for sure what is behind it—or how many masks there might be between us and himself.” The difference between poet and persona has been of crucial importance in modern Catullan scholarship; e.g., Quinn 1969, 54: “The common view rightly stresses the sincerity of Catullus’ poetry, but tends to confuse poetic sincerity with autobiographical truth.” Writing a generation later, Richlin does not mince words: “The separation of life and work is not only not real for Catullus (i.e., not included within the syntax of the poem); it is not even the issue at hand” (1992, 13).

74. Gaisser 2009, 48: “Furius and Aurelius are shown as guilty of what used to be called the biographical fallacy.”

75. See Adams 1982, 123, 132, 192, 228 on *cinaedus*; 123, 133, 190, 228 on *pathicus*.

76. On the reader’s position(ing) by c. 16 and others of similar genre, cf. Richlin 1992, 147: “This pattern [sc. ‘direct address of the victim by name, often introducing a question or series of questions’] helps to make the poem lively, especially since the reader finds himself in the position of the victim; the reader is simultaneously confronted with the vocative case, which identifies him with the victim, and reassured by the naming of a specific other person who is the ‘real’ victim. . . . The technique of forcing the audience into participation in an ob-scene dialogue is also similar to the workings of graffiti, in which the passerby is forced to see invective addressed either to another victim or to any passerby.”

77. For “singular” Catullus and “plural” addressees in a sexual context, cf. esp. c. 37, where Catullus assures his addressees that he, alone, will “dare to fuck their throats, two-hundred altogether” (vv. 7–8: *ausurum / me una ducentos irrumare sessores?*).

78. I owe this description to Arla Jean Berman, Bard College ’09.

Chapter 3. Poets, Poems, and Poetry

1. For silence as part of Roman performance, see McNeill 2010.
2. See Krostenko 2001.
3. Gaisser 2009, 18, emphasis added.
4. See Fitzgerald 1995, 87–113; on *urbanitas*’s positional nature: “Urbanity . . . is a position, for the urbane speaker claims his possession of that quality by drawing a line that shows, as it *excludes*, in what respect he has this *je ne sais quoi*” (93); and “there could be no ‘abiding principles of good taste’ or ‘general code of behavior’ for this society because improvisation and competition are the essence of style and intercourse” (96). See also Stevens 2008a, 165–68 (with sources there, esp. at 167n18). Krostenko 2001, 12, happily renders *urbanitas* as “metropolitanism.”

5. For addressees in Catullus, see Connolly 2012, 176–91.
6. For the “art of tact” in public speech, see Ahl 1984.
7. See Stevens 2008a, 168–71.
8. We have already seen, e.g., Gaiser call the conclusion “famous” (2009, 68). On c. 22, see Fordyce (1961) 1987, 146–52; Putnam 1968; Watson 1990; Thomson 1998, 258–62.
9. Cf. Janan 1994, 53, quoted and discussed in the introduction.
10. Catullus’s truly questioning poem seems to have informed Pliny the Younger’s more straightforwardly rhetorical criticism of a fellow senator: “What are we to think this man does at home, when in so great a matter, at such serious a time, he plays the rascal? When, in any case, he is witty and urbane in the senate?” (*quid hunc putemus domi facere qui in tanta re tam serio tempore tam scurriliter ludit, qui denique in senatu dicax et urbanus est?*; Ep. 4.25.3). The “language of social performance” as given shape by Catullus evidently retained its importance later in antiquity; it is possible, then, that his poetics of silence also continued, in some form, in later authors.
11. Cf. Hor. *Epist.* 2.2.107 on writers given to excessive self-satisfaction.
12. Also formally similar are cc. 27.4 (*ebriosa acino ebriosioris*) and 99.2 (a different meter: *suauiolum dulci dulcius ambrosia*).
13. This cultural savoir faire included cultivation of literary taste, both Latin and Greek. For Greek as valued by Romans for “self-expression,” see Pabón 1939.
14. On “taste” as *elegantia*, see Krostenko 2001, 34–39 and 114–23.
15. We could say that Catullus speaks *aperte* but not *palam*. As Quintilian (*Inst.* 9.2.65–8) indicates, Roman readers distinguished very finely among kinds of speech: obvious irony is distinguished (Quintilian’s 65) from the subtler differences between *dicere aperte*, “to speak openly to careful listeners,” and *dicere palam*, “to speak plainly or bluntly.” See Ahl 1984.
16. See Verboven 2002.
17. The poet also responds to others’ words. In Catullus, see, e.g., c. 51 as a “response” to Sappho’s c. 31; see further discussion in chap. 7, and Stevens, forthcoming.
18. Cf. Gaiser 2009, 68: Catullus’s “lack of self-awareness [sc., as he is evidently ‘blind to his own failures’ in c. 10] perfectly exemplifies the human failing he describes in the famous conclusion of 22.”
19. In this context, two different past participles, respectively, *expolitum* and *aequata*, both mean “smoothed” or “leveled out.”
20. An aspect of Catullus’s criticism of Suffenus is the latter’s mistaking the most extravagant of form, and therefore what is most exterior, for the best of content, and therefore what could be most interior; for the terminology here, I combine Miller 1994 and W. A. Johnson 2000. A partial parallel is provided by Johnson, discussing Lucian *Ind.*: Lucian “cast[s] aspersions on [a] man who is merely wealthy but without culture” (613), whose “bookrolls themselves are

outstandingly beautiful, with purple vellum slipcovers and gilt rollers, but [whose] reading itself is full of barbarisms (7, cf. 4). The provincial, that is, mistakenly concentrates on the beauty of the book as an object (4, 7, 16) and as a display of wealth and superficial education within his social group (19), rather than on the beauty and instruction of the text it contains (17)” (614). Unlike the book collector, Suffenus is not provincial in the boorish sense but indeed urbane and witty. The charge rather hinges on “urbanity in language” not being identical to “urbanity in poetry,” with surprising consequences for Catullus, discussed later in this chapter. To Lucian’s provincial, whose reading is “full of barbarisms,” we might compare Catullus’s (H)Arrius in c. 84.

21. For semiotic terms, see the sources cited in the introduction, n. 23.

22. See Gaisser 2009, 24: “It was usual for a poet to send his [suitable] draft—whether on tablets or carefully written out on papyrus—to a friend for comments and criticism,” citing Starr 1987 and comparing Quinn 1982; we may add Quinn 1979. For Catullus and Calvus in particular as engaging in this sort of playful exchange, cf. c. 96 with Gaisser 2009, 14–15 (“the neoterics liked to play with the same subjects, bouncing their ideas and themes back and forth” [14]; with discussion of Calvus’s fragmentary verses on Quintilia’s death).

23. See Gaisser 2009, 140: “Poem 50 is an invitation to Calvus to continue their poetic game, and the two poems provide the opening for a renewed exchange of verse,” citing Burgess 1986 and Wray 2001a, 95–99. Gaisser suggests that “the game sounds a lot like the kind of poetry contests in . . . poems 62 and 45” (2009, 141), discussed as such at her 104–7. “How might Calvus respond? Perhaps with another translation [an attractive notion!], in still another meter; perhaps with a new theme played out in two different versions in the manner of poems 50 and 51” (Gaisser 2009, 142). Cf. Wray 2001a, 96–109; “All these Catullan instances of poetic epistolarity (Poems 30, 38, 65, 66, 68, 116, and possibly 13) share two features in common. First, each of them makes sense only in the form of a *poem*. They cannot be read as poetic recastings, verse transcriptions, of letters originally written in prose. . . . The second feature common to these Catullan ‘letters’ is that the epistolary commerce they represent and imply is transacted exclusively between men” (105). Wray concludes about c. 51 that “if Lesbia is Catullus’ *puella diuina* (‘divine woman’), she is also what Cynthia would be to Propertius: his *scripta puella* (‘written woman’)” (108) (citing Lieberg 1962, 82–283; and Wyke 1987), for “both poems [sc. cc. 51 and 11] are notes passed, quite behind her back, from one man’s hand to another” (109). Cf. his 97, “say[ing] a new thing about it” by “compar[ing] this Catullan pair to Theocritus’ eleventh idyll” in its being paired with c. 50, a suggestion “that seems not to have resonated with the best recent literary treatments of Poem 51” (with earlier bibliography in 97n75). C. 51 is discussed further in chap. 7 of this volume.

24. Cf. Jameson (1991, 311–15) on the pyrrhic victory of “modernism,” resulting in a present that has no history but only a commodified “historic-

ity.” Alleged traditionalism or conservatism in a poetic genre could be considered a sort of “modernism,” retrojecting a fictional timelessness as the genre’s history.

25. On “technology” in antiquity, see Cuomo 2007, esp. 7–40; and Humphrey, Oleson, and Sherwood 1998; cf. Calame 2005.

26. Cf. Janan 1994, 49–58, esp. 49: “The wish to control the experience of desire and loss, to replace passivity with mastery, is a motivating force in poetry for both author and reader. We metaphorize for the same reason Catullus does, according to his own portrayal of his authorship in c.50: to deny the experience of division, loss, substitution—in short, to palliate metonymy.”

27. Cf. Wray 2001a, 78–80 (treating it as forming a pair with c. 37, discussion through p. 87), also emphasizing c. 36’s attention to poems: c. 36 is “one of seven in the corpus containing attacks by Catullus on the poetic production of other poets. . . . There is no indication anywhere in the corpus that Volusius, or any of the other poets whom Catullus attacks *qua* poets, was a rival in love” (79–80).

28. C. 1 is discussed in chap. 1. Scrolls, the primary “book” technology of Greek and Roman antiquity, were liable to fall apart on rereading; see Bülow-Jacobsen 2009.

29. There was hardly censorship, in a modern institutionalized sense, of literature or visual art in antiquity. There was certainly powerful constraint on expression, but this must be considered in relation to a strong cultural preference for “figured speech” (Ahl 1984). For some exceptions and their ramifications, see Rudich 1997 on literature and Zanker 1990 on political control of visual art. On iconoclasm, see W. J. T. Mitchell 2005, 5–27 and 125–44; Gamboni 1997, esp. 13–50 and 255–86; and Barasch 1992, with discussion in Stevens 2010.

30. As in other poems we have considered, so here the girlfriend goes unnamed.

31. V. 17: *non illepidum neque inuenustum*; this evokes precisely the description of wit in, e.g., cc. 1, 6, and 10.

32. Cc. 40 (“Why, what evil thought, poor little Raudus, drives you headlong into my iambs?”; *quaenam te mala mens, misella Raude, / agit praecipitem in meos iambos?*) and 54(b) (“You’ll be angered again because of my iambs, / however undeserving?”; *irascere iterum meis iambis / immerentibus?*) threaten their addressees with “iambs” (as does a fragment, Thomson’s 3 [= Porphyriion ad *Horati carmen* 1.16.22]: “but you won’t escape my iambs”; *at non effugies meos iambos*).

33. Thomson thinks that the “iambs” in question in c. 36 “must surely, in the context, be verses personally offensive to Lesbia” and argues, moreover, that they must be “iambs,” poems in that meter, as such: “If these were iambic (in which term of course one must include choliambic) in metre, and objectionable to Lesbia, they must consist either of poem 8 or of poem 37” (1998, 298). If we may accept poems in other meters, cf., e.g., cc. 25 (“Cocksucking Thallus, softer

than a rabbit's hair"; *Cinaede Thalle, mollior cuniculi capillo*) and 29 ("Who is able to see this, who able to endure it"; *quis hoc potest uidere, quis potest pati*), which level sexually explicit insults. Cf. the suggestion, discussed in chap. 2, that the final verse of c. 116 may imply a reorientation in Catullus's career from invective toward comedy.

34. Richlin suggests that *cacata carta* as an epithet "denotes not only [the poems'] worthlessness but the anal/oral receptivity of their author" (1992, 151). The insult is not beyond Catullus, but I am not certain that I hear it in c. 36.

35. The stakes are higher in cc. 68 and 101, discussed in chaps. 4 and 5.

36. A non-zero-sum game is one in which the total of gains and losses is always either positive or negative. It has been proved, however, that any non-zero-sum game of n players is identical to a zero-sum game of $(n+1)$ players, where the $(n+1)$ th player is the total of gains and losses. This provides a possible model for the totalizing victories of "poetry," which, insofar as it tends toward the absolute silence of death, could be identified as that $(n+1)$ th player. On terms and concepts in game theory, see Colman 1995; Wright 2001.

37. Volusius is in this way like the two gods, serving to offset Catullus as both more skillful than himself and more critically tasteful than his readers. This may be emphasized by the fact that all three of these figures' names begin with *V*, as does the topic of the poem, the "vow" (*uotum*).

38. Cf. c. 14, which concludes with a command to "the worst poets" to "go hence" (vv. 21 and 23: *uos hinc interea ualete abite . . . pessimi poetae*); and especially c. 49, in which Catullus reckons that he is "just as much the worst poet of all / as [Cicero] is the best patron" (vv. 6–7: *tanto pessimus omnium poeta, / quanto tu optimus omnium patronus*). In c. 49, the joke must be that, since Catullus does not sincerely call himself "worst," Cicero either cannot really be the best or is "best" in a heavily ironized way.

39. Hallett thus suggests that, since "Catullus assigns his Lesbia words . . . and thereby incorporates a female poetic voice, and perhaps the voice of an actual Roman female poet, into his literary scenarios . . . we should not rule out the possibility that [certain poems] might be read as paraphrasing poetry by the actual woman, Clodia Metelli, whom Catullus 'pseudonymises' as Lesbia. It is possible, for example, to rewrite the vow of Catullus' *puella* at lines 3–8 of poem 36 as a slightly different poem, in the same hendecasyllabic metre, but in the first person, as the words of the *puella* herself" (2006, 84; generally 76–85). May we imagine Catullus and his girlfriend regularly riffing on each other's poetry in this way? Cf. Ingleheart 2012 on Ov. *Tr.* 3.7.

40. The hendecasyllabic is so called for its eleven syllables (in two poems, cc. 55 and 58[b], Catullus occasionally achieves a ten-syllable line by substituting one long syllable for two short); technically it is called "Phalaecian." Garrison feels that "its insistent iambic second half gives it a colloquial, vernacular quality that evokes the comic stage [sc., because of comedy's iambic meters] and the rhythms of street language" (1991, 174).

41. This part of the poem is written “in parody of the lofty style appropriate to a vow to the gods. . . . especially in lines 11–16” (Thomson 1998 ad v. 7).

42. In this discussion I have benefited from the comments of an anonymous reader.

43. Chantraine 2000, q.v.

44. It may be with such a tradition in mind that Plato in the *Symposium* has Diotima articulate the theory that sexual attraction to earthly bodies can indeed conduce to philosophical experience of Beauty; see briefly chap. 1, n. 53.

45. For this formulation I am grateful to the anonymous reader mentioned in n. 42.

46. “Uranian” and “Pandemic” Aphrodites are distinguished at, e.g., *Symp.* 465d–e.

47. Cf. discussion in chap. 7 of c. 63, whose protagonist has castrated himself.

48. Thomson 1998, 297.

49. Is it close to the English expression “full of shit”?

50. For “taste” in Latin involving *sense* of taste and smell, see Stevens 2008a.

51. See Hom. *Il.* 8. 266–366; Ov. *Met.* 4.171–89. Latin allows a pun in the epithet for Vulcan, “slow-footed” (*tardipes*), that may be metapoetic. In Latin as in English, “foot” is a unit of metrical measurement, such that “slow-footed” could refer to the meters of elegiac couplet and scazon, the latter sometimes called “limping iambics”; see n. 61. Tastes in poems and taste in poets might overlap.

52. See Hurley 2004, 59: “Much as ugly Vulcan is mocked and overshadowed by his beautiful wife Venus in myth, Volusius, we may infer, is outclassed by Catullus and his clever girlfriend.”

53. Fordyce (1961) 1987, 181.

54. For *puella* and other words for “prostitute” in Latin, see Adams 1983.

55. On Cinna and his *Zmyrna*, see esp. Wiseman 1974, 44–58.

56. May we detect here a reference to the ancient fear of going unburied after death?

57. These “suits” may have been for cooking the fish rather than for transporting them. Since Volusius’s *Annals* frame, as if wrapping, c. 36, is the rest of that poem the “fish,” and the whole tossed into the fire for “cooking”?

58. C. 3 is discussed briefly in chap. 2.

59. Cf. 8.6–7, describing a time when “many ‘joking’ [sc. ‘sexual’] things were done, which [Catullus] wanted and the girlfriend did not want” (*ibi illa multa cum iocosa fiebant, / quae tu uolebas nec puella nolebat*).

60. For love-magical practices in Greek antiquity, see Faraone 1999.

61. Of poems discussed herein, cc. 22 and 39 are in “limping iambic,” and both of course insult their subjects, respectively Suffenus and Egnatius, although with different degrees of intensity.

62. This need not automatically mean “more learned than a girlfriend.”

In c. 35, not the poet Caecilius but his girlfriend is described as “more learned than the Sapphic Muse” (vv. 16–17: *Sapphica puella / musa doctior*), in context for having been aroused by a poem on Dindymus’s mistress (vv. 13–15: *nam quo tempore legit incohatum / Dindymi dominam, ex eo misellae / ignes interiorem edunt medullam*). Poems might thus be read for sexual pleasure, “getting a prurient itch up” indeed (16.9: *quod pruriat incitare possunt*); see Akbar Khan 1974. (I do not see Thomson’s reason for insisting that c. 35’s female reader is “quite imaginary” [1998, 295].) Cf. Francesca’s and Paolo’s arousal upon reading the story of Lancelot and Guinevere, as well as the pilgrim’s response to Francesca’s retelling, *Inferno* 5.127–42: they are moved to make love, and he faints at hearing about it.

63. Cf. Biondi’s feeling that Catullus was too sophisticated and realistic to believe in traditional religion (2007, 196–97, quoted and discussed in chap. 5).

64. We could say that every bon mot leads inevitably to *le ton beau de Catulle*, “Catullus’s beautiful sound” as well as “Catullus’s tomb.” I draw this pun from Hofstadter 1997.

65. Similar lessons may be drawn from ancient philosophy and rhetoric. See esp. Porter 2009 on traditions of philosophers’ voices, their students’ corresponding silence, and the rhetorical power that depends on and is troubled by the distinction between voice and (disembodied) speech. As Porter demonstrates, in ancient thinking “the barely material voice has powers of penetration that render it insidious and dangerous” (94, referring to Plut. *Quomodo adul.* 14F, Gell. 11.13.10, and Pl. *passim*; we may add Lucr. 4.524–614). This leads to “the ascendancy of the voice” (96, section title) as concretizing the “material, sensuous, and phenomenal aspects of language,” evidently inimical to philosophers, like Plato and Aristotle, for whom “the job of the voice is to express, transparently, rational thoughts” (99, referring to *Resp.* 397b and *Poet.* 19, respectively). This is contrasted with rhetorical and other material-linguistic discourses whose writers, “intent on discovering the music of the voice . . . dissolved all genre boundaries, including those between poetry and prose, into a stream of sounds. Sound, thus reinvented, was at once a durable material object yet endowed with an ephemeral life, and at the limit passing over into the domain of the ineffable. Sound, here, became sublime” (101, citing his own 2001).

Chapter 4. The Natural Silence of Death, Part 1

1. On this problem of expression in late Republican Rome, I have found especially thought-provoking Minyard 1985. Catullus seems to reflect the late Republic’s more technical “pervasive interest in language” (Rawson 1985, 105, 109, 110), what we might consider “ancient linguistic thought,” only in certain poems (e.g., c. 84, mocking a man who affects what he wrongly considers to be a cultured accent). We have no record of any interest on his part in a central issue, the origin of language (see, e.g., Lucr. 5.1028–90, with Stevens 2008b).

2. On “articulation” of language in ancient thought, see Pl. *Prt.* 322a6; Xen. *Mem.* 1.4.12 and 4.23.12; Arist. *Part. An.* 660a17–25 and [Pr.] 895a10–14, with Lloyd 1996, 38–66; Ax 1986 and 1978; and Zirin 1980 and 1974; Cic. *Nat. D.* 2.149; Lucr. 4.549–62 and 5.1028–9, with Stevens 2008b, 538–45; Strabo 2.1.30; Diod. Sic. 1.7–8; Lucian *Dem. Enc.* 14; Plut. *Dem.* 11; 1 Corinthians 14; in general Biville 2001; Laspia 1997.

3. On bodies and embodiments, see Wegenstein 2010 and 2006; and Hayles 1999.

4. These two may be imagined as experiencing their exile and its strong connection to mortality only in the light of Lucifer’s earlier exile: although he did not die, his exile, too, changed the relationship of his voice to the world. Cf. Mowbray’s reaction to his exile by Richard II (1.3.469–70): “What is thy sentence, then, but speechless death, / which robs my tongue from breathing native breath?”

5. Another powerfully urban poet feels “jealousy for the sort of vile animals / who can plunge themselves into a stupid sleep” (“Je jalouse le sort des plus vils animaux / Qui peuvent se plonger dans un sommeil stupide”; Charles Baudelaire, “De profundis clamavi,” vv. 12–13). Although his “stupide” has been translated variously, in this context I take it to mean “dumb” in the old sense of “inarticulate,” “speechless,” or “mute.” The human being wishes for the nonmeaningfulness that seems to characterize animal experience; since this seems to correlate with animals’ lack of language, the wish is to be nonhuman.

6. On the difficult ascent, note again how all the lines operate under hypothesis: “I would . . . if lament were enough.” Cf. the Sibyl’s famous declaration to Aeneas that “the way down into Avernus is easy . . . but to call back your steps and emerge into the air: that is the work, that is the struggle” (*facilis descensus Auerno. . . sed reuocare gradum superasque euadere ad auras / hoc opus, hic labor est*; 6.126–29); in forthcoming work I study this in connection with fictions by A. S. Byatt and Paul Harding.

7. The translation is Mitchell 1989. In trying to listen to Rilke carefully, I have found useful Torgersen 1998 and the essays in Leeder and Vilain 2010.

8. In ancient thinking, death shares with exile this negative effect on linguistic capacity; see Stevens 2009a, and some examples from Ovid in n. 63, this chap. Cf. Catullus’s 3.11–12, describing one “walking along a shadowy walk / thence, whence they say no one returns” (*it per iter tenebricosum / illuc, unde negant redire quemquam*). In the context of c. 3, referring to the death of Lesbia’s pet sparrow, the description is amusing; see discussion in chap. 2.

9. See Bülow-Jacobsen 2009.

10. See DuBois 2010, 57–71, with sources cited there; Fredrick 1997; and MacKendrick 2004.

11. This image is common in ancient language. Cf. Hebrew “human,” *adam*, and “earth” or “soil,” *adamah* (the overlap is crucial at Gen. 2:6–7) plus Pygmalion and his vivi(fie)d sculpture, an image of creation, alongside the

Hebrew golem. Perhaps also cf. the scanty handful of earth that, scattered over the corpse of Polyneices, would stand for full burial and satisfy Antigone's piety toward the chthonic, earthly gods.

12. For an argument that poems are *not* implicitly speech acts, see Edmunds 2001.

13. These conditions resulted in distinctive practices, including that of the palimpsest, in which a single sheet would be used for more than one text over time, the older texts showing through the newer. Cf. the late antique poetic art of producing *centos*, "recompositions" of older lines or part lines into new works; see esp. McGill 2005.

14. For self-recrimination at a moment of recognition, cf. Catullus's declaration at the turning point of c. 52: whereas formerly Lesbia's story was that she would marry no one over him, not even Jupiter (vv. 1–2: *dicebas quondam solum te nosse Catullum, / Lesbia, nec prae me uelle tenere Iouem*), "now I know what you are" (v. 5: *nunc te cognoui*).

15. Cf. c. 11's image of Catullus's rejection by Lesbia: his love "has fallen like the flower of a distant field, after it is touched by an impassive plow" (vv. 21–24: *cecidit uelut prati / ultimi flos, praetereunte postquam / tactus aratro est*). To Catullus this is a particular, awful experience. To Lesbia, by contrast, it seems hardly an experience at all but rather a function of her nature, figured here, as in some other poems, as involving a kind of mechanical indifference (cf., e.g., c. 58, noted briefly in chap. 2, n. 40).

16. For women as proverbially untrustworthy, see Festus, *Gloss. Lat.* 1165: "One must trust neither to woman nor to lap/womb. This is a proverb: a woman is of uncertain and changeable mind, and oftentimes things placed in a lap/fold fall out when they are forgotten by people as they stand up" (*Nec mulieri nec gremio credi oportet. Prouerbiū est, quod et illa incerti et levis animi est et plerumque in gremio posita, cum in obliuionem uenerunt exsurgentiū, procidunt*). With the phrase "*credi oportet*" perhaps recalling 70.4 (*scribere oportet*), and with the image of an item falling out of a forgetful person's lap recalling c. 65, it is possible that Catullus influenced the proverb or vice versa. Cf. Fitzgerald on c. 65: "The shaking out of the apple [sc. from a maiden's 'lap,' *gremium*], like the pressing out of Callimachus's words in the translation, points to the public, alienable nature of words and poems" (1995, 193); see further discussion of c. 65 in this chapter and chap. 5. In antiquity the phrase *uerba dare*, literally "to give words," was an idiom for "tricking someone"; see Batstone 2009, 213–15, on Plaut. *Rud.* 996: "You're not doing anything, you're hoping to trick me [literally 'give me words'], you scoundrel!" (*nil agis, dare uerba speras mihi te posse, furcifer*).

17. Fitzgerald 1995.

18. Strictly speaking, there are more poems devoted to, e.g., skewering Gellius for his alleged sexual perversions than poems treating the death of Catullus's brother. In fact Catullus's brother is otherwise unknown.

19. The timing of the death poems relative to one another is debated. Cf. Konstan 1977, 83: “There is no way of knowing [when Catullus composed cc. 65 and 68].” In cc. 10, 28, 31, and 46 combined, Catullus says that he spent time in Bithynia under Memmius. It is not recorded when Memmius was there or whether he was *propraetor*. We know only that he was *praetor* in 58, “from which we may guess that he probably went on to govern some province in the office of *propraetor*” the following year; and we may say that “Bithynia would be suitable” (Thomson 1998, 5). It is therefore possible that Catullus visited his brother’s grave close in time to his service in nearby Bithynia, such that the brother’s death could be dated near the spring of 57 BCE, when Catullus set out for that province. Assuming a lag between visit to grave and composition of poem, Catullus may have written c. 65 while at home in Verona, as he seems to have written c. 68(a), where again, as we will see later, he attributes a lapse in his poetic activity to his brother’s death. Such historical speculation need not bear decisively on the sorts of readings offered herein.

20. Skinner 2003, 128.

21. An earlier version of the myth is found in Homer (*Od.* 19.518–23), but as Gaisser puts it, “Catullus and Homer’s Penelope use the nightingale simile a little differently: his initial point of comparison is the sadness of his song, hers the rapid movement of her thoughts. But basic to both is the idea of grief and the endless mourning for a dead kinsman” (2009, 145). By Catullus’s verses I am put in mind of Shakespeare, sonnet 73: “That time of year thou mayst in me behold, / When yellow leaves, or none, or few do hang / Upon those boughs which shake against the cold, / Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.” Romantic poetry makes much out of the nightingale’s, and other birds’, songs as symbols of personal expression; especially famous is, of course, Keats’s “Ode to the Nightingale,” but cf., e.g., the ending to Wordsworth’s *Prelude* (1805 13.377–85: the poet is like the lark). See Lutwack 1994.

22. For a version of this story, see Ov. *Met.* 6.422–674, with interesting discussion in Oliensis 2009, 77–88.

23. Cf. Juliet’s use of traditional, even cliché, metaphorical language to express her feelings after first meeting Romeo: from her perspective, she speaks with the freshness of new experience. Cf. Janan 1994, 49, quoted in chap. 3, n. 26.

24. In his awareness of this change, Catullus is like his contemporaries Lucretius and Cicero; see n. 1 of this chapter.

25. Cf. Miller 1994, 113 (emphasis added): “The place of his brother’s death, the coast of Troy, is itself poetically significant. This is where Achilles laid waste to the Trojan army in [poem] 64, as well as where Laodamia’s husband will meet his fate in poem 68. Thus, these two *mythological exempla* take on *personal resonances*, allowing them to color Catullus’s own depiction of loss both . . . in 65[.1–16] and in . . . 68[.89–92].” On the latter passage Miller cites Block 1984, 50–54. I would only change his “allowing” to “obliging”: the interaction of

mythological-poetical and personal-poetical seems to me more insistent, not an option exercised by the willing poet but, like funeral ritual, an obligation whose traditional associations are indifferent to his desire or agency.

26. Skinner 2003, 5–14, develops an intriguing reading of the location being “Rhoetean” in particular. Cf. Oliensis 2009, 28–29; and Hutchinson 1988, 300n46 (seeing in the “geographical lore [of] *Rhoeteo*” a “relatively detached exposition” [299–300]).

27. The *loci classici* feature Achilles. In the *Iliad*, we are reminded of his having to choose between obscurity in peaceful domesticity and glory caused by violent death in war (9.410–16). In the *Odyssey*, we see him perhaps regretting his decision, saying to Odysseus that he would rather be a slave aboveground than a king in the underworld (11.488–91). On the figure of Achilles, see further the conclusion to this chapter.

28. Another death poem, c. 101, seems to confirm that Catullus intends these declarations to be permanent, with “always,” *semper*, matched by and taking on the sense of “forever,” *in perpetuum*. In my view, this is a world apart from the ironically particularizing claim of c. 1, “may [the *libellus*] last more than a single generation” (v. 1: *plus uno maneat perenne saeclo*). We may only speculate as to whether the poems as we have them match either (or both?) of those visions. Did the poet himself, after his brother’s death, hear his own earlier poems differently or understand their meanings differently?

29. Cf. Havelock’s scathingly sarcastic summation (1939, 80–81, noted in the introduction).

30. Whether c. 68 is one poem or, as I refer to them, two (a and b) is debated; see esp. Thomson 1998, 472–74. At 472 Thomson summarizes Vretska’s “not altogether implausible account” (1966, 327–8; following Wohlberg 1955 and Della Corte 1951) that 68(a).36, standing in the collection as prefatory to c. 68(b), refers to c. 68(b) as “an earlier composition which [Catullus] happened to have ready to hand (for touching-up?) in a *capsula* . . . and added it after inserting the interpolation [sc. vv. 91–100] as a connection of thought” between c. 68(a) and c. 68(b). “So 68b was sent off as a gift, *faute de mieux*.” Having outlined difficulties with the “unity,” however, including metrical differences, Thomson concludes that “if 68a and 68b are parts of a single composition, this difference has to be explained.” On c. 68 (a and b) I have benefited from Hubbard 1984, 24–49; other sources are cited as relevant in the following discussion.

31. The friend’s name is either corrupt in the manuscripts or confused by the similarity with the addressee of c. 68(b) or both. In calling him “Mallius,” I follow Skinner 1997.

32. On the bed as site of intimacy, see discussions of cc. 6 and 50 in chaps. 1 and 3.

33. Cf. c. 35, noted in chap. 3, n. 62. It is easy to imagine a reading audience eagerly awaiting new poems as old poems grew overly familiar and so perhaps less effectual.

34. We might compare Catullus's one-upmanship of the girlfriend's vow in c. 36, discussed in chap. 3.

35. The second person's personhood, now and forever only former, may emphasize the disquieting possibility that the *first person's* personhood is itself always only a fictive persona.

36. See the discussion near n. 43 for the suggestion that the "household" is Catullus's family line, broken at his brother's death because—it is implied—Catullus himself has or will have no (male) children.

37. Thomson (1998, 478 ad loc.) suggests that this might be Catullus's regular practice.

38. See Fitzgerald 1995, 201–3; and on Catullus's "Transpadane Background" Wiseman 1985, 107–15. The tension is an especially important feature of c. 68(a)'s fiction in light of the implausibility of the idea that Catullus would have needed a well-stocked library to answer Mallius. "It seems artificial to suppose that C[atullus] needs a whole library to cope with a friend's request for lines to take a vexed mind 'out of itself.' Nor should we imagine that M[allius] expected C[atullus] to sit down there and then and compose a long, learned work for which histories and encyclopaedias were indispensable" (Thomson 1998, 478 ad loc.).

39. Cf. the more general tension between imperial city and empire. I discuss c. 65 in somewhat similar terms later; cf. cc. 10 and 11 as discussed by Fitzgerald 1995, 169–84 (173: "Imperial power underwrites loose talk in the metropolis, and it is against the background of this loose talk that the distinctive capacities of poetry are enabled to appear").

40. Quoted material from Fitzgerald 1995, 186.

41. My translation construes *domus* as working with the dative of possessor *mihi* in the following line.

42. The use of first-person plural forms for a singular subject is unremarkable in Latin. Here, however, I think that the contrast between first-person plural *uiuimus*, "we [who] live," and singular *mihi*, "to me," signals the difference between Catullus's past participation in an actual plural, including his brother, and his present and future isolation.

43. "Illegitimacy" may be precise, suggesting the poet's or artist's feeling, when faced with biological crisis, of not having truly created. "As one with you our whole house is buried" (v. 22: *tecum una tota est nostra sepulta domus*) may mean the end, in Catullus's mind, of his family line. The repeated images of waves (vv. 3–4 and 13) and flowing waters as well as fruit (sometimes in combination, as at 65.1–4) are, in antiquity, connotative of birth.

44. Fitzgerald 1995, 114.

45. Where c. 68(a) dwells on the incapacity of poet and the inadequacy of poetry to express meaningfully in the context of death, c. 101 focuses on the inadequacy of traditional formula or ritual; see chap. 5, including discussion of Feldherr 2007a.

46. Miller 1994, 117.

47. Miller draws deeply on Bakhtin 1981.

48. Similarly, none of the poems explicitly concerned with the brother's death is addressed to a lover. This might be a coincidence, but still it suggests how death overwhelms desire.

49. Thomson does not comment on *obdura(t)* (1998, 226–29). That *durus*, the opposite of *mollis*, should refer to hardness as manliness as a metonym for full erection is clear from Catullus's c. 16 and various epigrams of Martial, e.g., 11.22. Thomson adduces "some fairly weighty reasons against accepting" (227) the notions, which he attributes first to Morris 1909, that c. 8 is "humorous [in] tone, and [is an] attempt to win back Lesbia's love" (226), connecting it instead, via the similarity of its v. 5 to 37.12, to the *truces iambi* disliked by Lesbia in c. 36. Cf. c. 11, which may be read as imagining a sort of sex tour through places of imperial conquest but whose ending, like c. 8's, swerves away from the hyper-masculine swagger of the claim.

50. C. 2 characterizes Lesbia as "tending to give her finger for nipping and to tease on sharp bites" (vv. 3–4: *digitum dare appetenti / et acris solet incitare morsus*) from her "plaything," her "sparrow" (v. 1: *passer, deliciae meae puellae*). Despite long-standing interest in *passer* as possibly a metaphor for "penis" (see discussion in chap. 2), to my knowledge relatively little interest has been shown in this biting or in sexual biting in Roman poetry generally; R. F. Thomas 1993 is silent on this topic, as are the likely candidates C. A. Williams 2010 and Richlin 1992.

51. A similar language of desire may be applied to family as to love affairs. Cf. the declaration, at first glance likely odd to modern eyes, that Catullus loved Lesbia "not as one commonly cherishes a friend, / but as a father cherishes his children by birth and by marriage" (72.3–4: *dilexi tum te non tantum ut uulgus amicam, / sed pater ut gnatos diligit et generos*). The point of the comparison seems to be the depth of feeling. Ancient readers might have been struck less by the comparison between "romantic" and "fatherly" love than by the suggestion that a father could deeply love children of bloodlines other than his own; Catullus's sense of what constitutes a "household," like his sense of "romantic" marriage, warrants additional consideration.

52. Fitzgerald 1995, 114 and 139, the latter on c. 70's "last words"; see generally 114–39.

53. These *deliciae* are of the sort present in so many words in cc. 2, 3, 6, and 50, to take only poems discussed in this volume so far.

54. We will see in chap. 5, how c. 101 figures traditional funerary practice as likewise repulsive.

55. It is remarkable to recall that the other "autobiographical" poems hardly report or respond to a death.

56. As in c. 16, whose "pious poet, himself" (vv. 5–6: *pium poetam / ipsum*)

may be interpreted as referring to, and therefore distinguishing Catullus from, epic poets; see chapter 2, n. 71 and text near it.

57. Fitzgerald 1995, 186.

58. For conversations in this mode, see also cc. 50 and 1, discussed in chapter 1, as well as, e.g., c. 15, in which Catullus “dedicates” not a poem but persons, both himself and his young lover: “I entrust to you, Aurelius, myself and my lover/love affair” (vv. 1–2: *commendo tibi me ac meos amores, / Aureli*); on c. 15, see Fitzgerald 1995, 46–55.

59. I disagree with Thomson, who sees in v. 10’s *muneraque et Musarum hinc petis et Veneris* a “careful disjunction, by means of *et* . . . *et*, between the *munera Musarum* and the <*munera*> *Veneris*,” such that vv. 15–26 “seem to have nothing to do with literature [and] certainly they need not be taken as referring to poetry, even to love poetry”; Thomson concludes that v. 17’s *lusi*, “I played,” is merely “I played the lover” (“C[atullus] is still talking about *munera Veneris* rather than those of the Muses”), and v. 19’s *studium*, “zeal” or “pursuit,” has “no literary overtones, but simply of love or flirtation,” with literature as a topic returned to only in v. 33, where “*nam* is used, transitionally, as passing to a new subject.” Thomson’s argument strikes me as being too ingenious. I agree with Quinn 1969, 50, plus his n. 5, that “Catullus himself tells us he had just assumed the toga of manhood when his first experiences of love came—and he began writing” (citing 68.15–18); n. 15: “Quite obviously, even if Catullus is not actually speaking of writing poetry [sc., in *lusi*], it is poetry he has in mind as the general context shows.” The parallel between *lusi* here and *lusimus* in c. 50 suggests that it may be poetry in particular, as opposed to signs of social interaction more generally, that Catullus has in mind. On c. 10 in conjunction with c. 11, see Fitzgerald 1995, 169–84.

60. See further discussion of this point in chaps. 5 through 7.

61. Roman poetry waits for Virgil for a writer with the temper to treat full-scale epic as Catullus could hear it: tragically, with a sense indeed that “the world is a world of tears, and mortality burdens the mind” (*Aen.* 1.148: *sunt lacrimae rerum et mentem mortalia tangunt*). Even Virgil, however, or perhaps Virgil precisely, could give voice to collective memory only once he had developed his poetry, over decades, away from his personal voice. In the *Aeneid* it is Aeneas who speaks . . . but even Aeneas speaks reluctantly, out of what has been taken to be his characteristic silence; see Feeney 1983. See esp. Aeneas’s emotional response to Dido’s request for the story of Troy (2.1–13) and the silence into which he falls once the story is (not quite completely) told (3.718); both moments arguably draw on images of Odysseus responding to songs about himself.

62. I owe the phrase “hollow good” to a review of A. S. Byatt’s *Possession* (1990) by Stuart Whitwell for *Booklist Review*.

63. Janan 1994, 118; generally 115–30. Cf. how G. D. Williams describes a similar situation facing Ovid: “The poems . . . bear witness to the soul-searching

tension and despair which made them at the same time necessary and yet apparently impossible to write” (1994, 56). Ovid claims that, when early in his life he “attempted to write prose, a poem appeared of its own accord in the appropriate meter, and what [he] was trying to say became verse” (*scribere temptabam uerba soluta modis. / sponte sua carmen numeros ueniebat ad aptos, / et quod temptabam dicere uersus erat*; Tr. 4.10.24–6). As a result, toward what would be the end of his life he composed incessantly (“despite it all, to tell you the truth, my Muse can’t be stopped from writing poetry” [*nec tamen, ut uerum fatear tibi, nostra teneri / a componendo carmine Musa potest*; Tr. 5.12.59–60]) for no one and despite the fact that poetry had been part of the reason for his relegation from Rome. (Tr. 5.12 echoes Catullus’s cc. 65 and 68; see G. D. Williams 1994, 55–58.) Poetry therefore offers only “cold consolation” (*quid nisi Pierides, solacia frigida, restant, / non bene de nobis quae meruere deae?*; Pont. 4.2.45–6): constantly writing what no one will read is like dancing in the dark (*siue quod in tenebris numerosos ponere gestus, / quodque legas nulli scribere carmen, idem est*; Pont. 4.2.29–34). On Ovid and language in exile, see Stevens 2009a, with sources cited there, and Grebe 2010.

64. On Ennius’s claim, see Skutsch 1985, 147–53. For the claim as a *topos*, indeed a “contemporary critical cliché” for the Augustan poets, see N. G. G. Davis 1987 on Hor. *Carm.* 1.6 (quotation from 295).

65. For Alexander envying Achilles in this way, see Cic. *Arch.* 24. Homer also had Odysseus, but rarely does a Roman express admiration for “hard Ulysses” (*Aen.* 2.7), who seems to have been disliked for his deceitfulness.

66. The positive value attached to this activity meant that “composition” included both what we would consider original composition and what we could consider (literary) translation. Roman literary authors do not seem to have distinguished evaluatively, in a consistent way, between types of translation, including “word-for-word” (*uerbum pro uerbo* or *uerbatim*; the activity is *interpretari*, “to interpret”), considered by some sources appropriate to technical or nonliterary texts, and “literary” (*pro sensu*; the activity is *uertere*, “to turn” or, emphasizing the etymology, “to produce a version”). See Rochette 1993.

67. I am reminded of a story about Évariste Galois: anticipating his death in a sunrise gunfight, he is said to have spent that night writing out all the potentially novel mathematics he could, along with the phrases “I have not enough time” and “a woman.”

68. Orpheus’s story is told variously. See, e.g., Ap. *Rhod. Argon.* 1.23–34 and 4.891–909; and Ov. *Met.* 10.1–105 and 11.1–66; with Segal 1989 and West 1983.

69. In calling his audience to cause his own death, is Orpheus suicidal? He seems, as it were, reflexively Sirenian, singing himself to a literal distraction. The result is a sort of happy ending, as he and Eurydice are reunited in the underworld.

70. Raleigh 1908, 28. Oliensis offers an intriguing reading of these poems

in a Freudian or psychoanalytic perspective, drawing attention as well to—and drawing on—Orpheus and Eurydice (2009, 14–56). I have benefited from her suggestive engagement with Enterline 2000 and Miller 2004.

71. Might there be some sympathy for Saturn, and by extension the other Titans, in the brief account of his “exile” to Italy narrated by Evander to Aeneas (Verg. *Aen.* 8. 319–27)?

72. May we imagine a sort of “poetry” or “music” in the hundred-mouthed sounds of Typhoeus, or in how they would have struck his companions? It seems that these hypothetical poetries would come not quite so deeply out of loss.

73. Cf. Richlin 1992, 30, arguing generally with regard to “the complex of words based on the root *-fa-*, ‘speak,’ that are often applied to sexual activities. . . . [that] the idea is not so much that these things are not to be spoken of; rather by being spoken of too much—by being too gossipworthy—they demean, even stain, those involved in them.” In my view this is significantly different from modern (poetic) ideas about “ineffability.” The evaluative axis of “moral” and “immoral” is not identical to an axis of “effable” and “ineffable.” At the same time, too, it matters that any such evaluative axis in antiquity was determined in part by the society: “The kinds of things that Romans reported saying to each other as gossip or circulating as jingles were couched in nicer language than were graffiti and depended on implication rather than on direct statements. Perhaps literate Romans did call each other names, but if so they did not like to record their slanging matches” (Richlin 1992, 83–84); cf. her 228n6 for “abs[tinence] from indecent speech especially in the hearing of the Vestals”; of interest here is Benveniste 1960. How much is actual practice in the society, how much a practice exaggerated or only purported in discourse?

Chapter 5. The Natural Silence of Death, Part 2

1. Janan 1994, 130.

2. Janan 1994, 128–29.

3. Some readers have argued that the most emotional poems are among the least successful artistically. E.g., “commentators are generally agreed that Catullus has [in c. 72] not quite succeeded in his attempt to describe an experience that was new in antiquity” (Fitzgerald 1995, 135, citing Lyne 1980, 40; Commager 1965, 95; and Kroll 1929, 244); and “almost all commentators have remarked on the extreme stylistic awkwardness of a poem [sc. c. 76] that is sometimes described as an artistic failure” (Fitzgerald 1995, 126, citing Lyne 1980, 33; and Commager 1965, 98; but G. W. Williams 1968 sees “careful artistry”).

4. See Gaisser 2009, 144–50, “the idea of divided loyalties” (146) or “the dilemma of conflicting claims” (147) at the center of c. 65 as of its final simile. See also Wiseman 1969, 17–20; Wray 2001a, esp. 98–104; Thomson 1998, 443–47. I regret not having space fully to discuss c. 65, to my mind among the most

wonderful texts in Latin. I have benefited from conversations about the poem with the students who took intermediate and advanced Latin at Bard College in fall 2010.

5. On c. 66, see Thomson 1998, 447–65; Gutzwiller 1992; Courtney 1985b; and Marinone 1984, 103–285. Two salient features of c. 66 are, first, that an inanimate object, a lock of hair, speaks and so reveals what might otherwise have been kept quiet; and, second, that changes in gender—Catullus figures a feminine lock of hair, while in his model it is masculine—further develop Catullus's images of agency as being limited in society and by culture. On gender, especially feminized images of agency, see chaps. 6 and 7.

6. Hortalus being rather more highly placed in Roman society than Catullus, it is possible that he either did not know or did not care about the death of Catullus's brother.

7. Skinner 2003, esp. 13–19.

8. On the blush, cf. Skinner 2003, 18: "In Roman society, the blush is the external mark of *pudor*, the ethical emotion mandating submission to cultural norms. Hence blushing is the expected response of an adolescent whose bid for emotional autonomy has been checked. . . . By blushing, Catullus' heroine concedes her powerlessness in the face of parental authority. The vignette is thus a mini-drama of seduction averted and family honor saved. Yet, in describing her as *miseræ*, the Catullan speaker intimates that his sympathies lie with the girl"; after Lateiner 1998, 185; and citing Barton 1999, 215; and Kaster 1997, 7–8. For *consciis*, cf. the "accomplice air" that attends Dido's and Aeneas's "bedding down together" (*Aen.* 4.167–68: *consciis aether / conubiis*). In the same book, the stars are likewise "accomplices" of fate (519–20: *conscia fati / sidera*), and Juno "complicit" in Dido's cares (608: *curarum . . . conscia Iuno*). These uses charge the first appearance of *consciis* in the poem with foreboding: Aeneas describes Dido as "knowing in her mind what's right" (1.604: *mens sibi conscia recti*).

9. Cf. how Dido calls it a marriage (*Aen.* 4.172), while Aeneas "never did" (4.338–39). Clearly the questions of whether and how an act, especially a sexual act, was entered into discourse were live and consequential questions in antiquity. Cf. the girls in c. 62, knowing that a change in sexuality leads to an irrevocable change in public reputation (vv. 39–47, using a metaphorical language of "flowers"; cf. Sappho 105[c] L–Pl; Soph. *Trach.* 144–49, with Alfonsi 1970 and Akbar Khan 1971).

10. The link goes back at least to Plato's *Symposium*, in which something like poetic composition or cultural production is expressly suggested as a substitute for men's incapacity to bear children. Cf. Shakespeare sonnets 1 ("From fairest creatures we desire increase") and 2 ("When forty winters shall besiege thy brow"), suggesting that having a child who inherits your youthful beauty is a way to fight death. The phrase *mens animi* seems Lucretian (but see Thomson 1998, 438 ad 64.408: Lucretian "expressions may, as often as not, go back to a common source in Ennius").

11. The young woman's apple is the evident analogue for Catullus's "fruits," produced similarly and emphasizing how he ostensibly cannot produce. A "natural" or biological analogue would be the child she stands to bear if she is indeed pregnant, but this must remain speculative.

12. See further chap. 6.

13. Vv. 200–201: *quali solam Theseus me mente reliquit / tali mente, deae, funestet seque suosque*.

14. See chap. 4, n. 63.

15. Quinn calls this "elliptical treatment" (1969, 83).

16. This would make c. 65, like c. 68, "demystifying" (Hubbard 1984) indeed: not only of the self, but also of how the self's entrance into language or discourse is deeply conditioned by silence.

17. Scholarship on c. 101 is cited and discussed as appropriate in this section.

18. See Gaisser 2009, 136–38; seminally Conte 2007 (1971), 168–75, and 1986, 32–39; and Monteleone 1976.

19. For a Roman to liken himself to "hard Ulysses" (*Aen.* 2.7) may suggest how strongly Catullus's response to the death runs counter to, and is not captured by, both traditional funerary ritual and the commemorative function of poetry. Does Catullus here signal regret for his own "many twists and turns," for having spent too much poetic time away from the topic of "home"?

20. See Casson 1994.

21. For Aeneas's "taciturnity," see seminally Feeney 1983.

22. Cf. Biondi 2007, 188–9: Virgil, "in the underworld encounter of Aeneas and Anchises . . . picks up the very first line of Catullus poem. . . . Virgil had therefore understood to what point of Odysseus's long journey Catullus was alluding," namely, "the journey to the kingdom of the dead," such that we may understand 101 as being—and having been understood in antiquity as being—"a palinode of Homer's *Nekyia*" (189). Biondi's reading is discussed further later in this chapter.

23. These are the second and third lines of Anchises's greeting. For *audire et reddere uoces*, cf. Catullus's 64.166 (breezes are "able neither to hear voices uttered nor to answer": *nec missas audire queunt nec reddere uoces*); the speaker is Ariadne. See further chap. 6.

24. C. 101 and c. 65 are linked also at the levels of word choice and image, including "gloom" (*tristi*), "wretchedness" (*miserae, miseras*), and of course "flow" (*manans, manat*). These parallels are discussed further later in the chapter.

25. See Gaisser 2009, 118–21; "an epigram in a more literal way than Catullus's other epigrams, for it is presented as something that might be inscribed on stone. . . . Many real funeral epigrams (some in elegiac couplets like poem 101) survive from antiquity, and there are many more epigrams of a purely literary nature that were composed to imitate them. Catullus's poem belongs in this latter group. Its traditional pedigree, which would have been obvious to an

ancient reader, is part of its powerful emotional effect" (118). For a somewhat contrasting reading, see Feldherr 2007a, discussed later in this chapter.

26. C. 101 may be read as furthering Catullus's development of "meditative lyric" (Quinn 1969) in a combination of elegy and epigram. See Biondi 2007, 189–91: c. 101 is distanced "from Meleager's lament for Heliodora . . . its closest model . . . but even from the genre of epigram itself, so that, as Wilamowitz put it, only brevity marks this poem (like poem 99) as an epigram rather than an elegy." (The Wilamowitz-Moellendorff work referred to is 1924, 234: "nur die Kürze unterscheidet diese 'Epigramme' (101; 99) von der Elegie.")

27. This is not to say that Aeneas, or for that matter other epic protagonists, are figured as communicating with the dead in straightforward ways. E.g., when Aeneas addresses Dido in the underworld, she keeps a literal silence, responding only with eloquent looks before distancing herself from him (*Aen.* 6.469–74); and before Odysseus may speak with the dead Teiresias, he must restore his voice by drinking blood (11.99–100). Yet one difference between "epic" and at least Catullan "lyric" seems to be that, in "lyric," communication with the dead is completely impossible; see discussion of c. 96 later in the chapter.

28. Biondi 2007, 196; cf. 197, quoted in the text at n. 59.

29. On "oceanic" feeling, see Freud 1989; on Freud and Roman literature, see Oliensis 2009. An evocative description of the American Great Plains prior to easy travel has helped me to see more clearly how, in reference to such distances and "uncivilized" wastes, "oceanic" "was not a term of beauty" (Gwynne 2010, 39).

30. The possibility of this comparison is noted by Thomson: "*maria uasta*: taken together, the words are descriptive of the 'sundering' sea, dividing the youth from his homeland. The same underlying notion is to be found in poem 64 . . . and poem 101" (1998, 381). On c. 63, see chap. 6.

31. Since Attis has castrated himself, he also serves to confirm the impression that Catullus feels unproductive as a result of his brother's death. See additional discussion in chap. 7.

32. Additional contrasts are imaginable: the tears may be hot but cool quickly, while the ash was formerly hot indeed and may yet retain some of that heat; the tears flow downward, in a way toward the sea, while the ash lies still or, at most, flakes upward and eddies in a breeze.

33. Gaisser 2009, 119–20, is especially interesting on the poem's temporalities.

34. See, e.g., c. 51, discussed in chap. 7.

35. Cf. Fitzgerald 1995, 188, quoted herein, n. 55.

36. Biondi 2007, 182.

37. Biondi 2007, 182.

38. "Disproportion": Biondi 2007, 182 and 184; quoted material 191–92.

39. Biondi 2007, 182.

40. All of this is I think not obviated if we adopt Kroll's solution to the grammatical "problem": namely, that *aduenio* is equivalent to *ueni et adsum*, "I

am come,” such that the imperfect subordinate verbs could be taken to follow *uectus*, “having been transported, I am arrived,” itself referring to past time.

41. Cf. Thomson 1998, 538: “Poem 65 speaks of the brother’s death as a recent event (*nuper*, line 5) which still exerts a paralysing effect on C[atullus], and the same effect is manifest in 68.19–24.”

42. Conte 2007, 168.

43. Conte 2007, 173.

44. Biondi 2007, 194.

45. For the dead as “silent,” *silentes*, see further n. 52.

46. Feldherr 2007a.

47. Quoted material from Feldherr 2007a, 407; see esp. 407–10.

48. Feldherr 2007a, 408.

49. Quoted material from Feldherr 2007a, 410; cf. 402: “the poem as a text, performed or circulating in writing among the society of Catullus’ friends.”

50. Fitzgerald is more restrained: “So communication across the grave proves possible, but only if the addressee is displaced by Catullus himself, for it is only the poem *as poem* that can overcome the futility of the poem’s address to the dead. In this connection, Catullus’s ‘meanwhile’ (*interea*, 7) suggests that the poem is provisional in the sense that it will only activate its system of positions once the poet has died” (1995, 188). C. 101 would thus imply the death of its author as utterance tends toward silence.

51. Feldherr 2007a, 400.

52. Feldherr 2007a, 399, referring to Quinn 1970 and Fitzgerald 1995. Feldherr describes a “contrast between the irreversible flow of time and the present instant govern[ing] the poem’s content” (2007a, 223). Cf. Skinner 2003, 128, quoted in chap. 4, at n. 20.

53. Feldherr 2007a, 416. In this connection Feldherr notes that “the Roman dead . . . could in fact be referred to simply as ‘the silent ones,’ *silentes*,” citing OLD s.v. *silens* §3.

54. Feldherr 2007a, 419 and 418.

55. Cf. Fitzgerald 1995, 188: “The placing of this composite and contradictory gesture [sc. *aue atque uale*] at the poem’s end aligns the moment of Catullus’s address to his brother with the simultaneous appearance and disappearance of the completed poem, which flashes into presence only to merge with silence.” Fitzgerald is right to imply that “presence” involves “speech” (see White 2010, with bibliography) while “silence” involves “absence.”

56. Cf. Biondi 2007, 195: “Catullus, while on the one hand respecting all that is traditional, objective, and ‘canonical’ in the ritual, at the same time observes its inadequacy and in the last analysis its emptiness; an emptiness he attempts to fill with the gift of his own grief and love, of all that is most personal, subjective, and intimate in him. . . . The elevated language (the language of the ‘poetic fathers’) accompanies the need to overcome death, supported by tradition (*mos parentum*) and inherited myth (Odysseus in the kingdom of the dead);

on the other hand, the everyday language reflects the poet's brotherly grief in the face of the ineluctable, so that feeling alone remains as the single point of contact between the living and the dead." For a powerful, personal response to c. 101, see Anne Carson's *Nox* (2010).

57. Green 2005, 265, emphasis added; after Feldherr 2007a, 216–20.

58. Cf. Davis 1971, 300: "a single conditional sentence arranged neatly into three couplets. The first couplet is the protasis, the second is a relative clause defining the protasis, and the third is the apodosis." In his n. 1 on that page, Davis compares Kroll, Quinn approving, Fraenkel disapproving, Bardonn "bas[ing] his structure for the poem on its syntax: 'vv. 1–4 pensée générale, vv. 5–6 cas particulier.'"

59. This reading is strengthened by the additional, intertextual parallel drawn earlier between Catullus's pointless gift to his brother in c. 101 and Aeneas's warm welcome by his deceased father at *Aen.* 6.692–93. Catullus excludes precisely that epic prospect of communication with the dead; instead he dwells on the solitude of lyric expression.

60. Biondi 2007, 197.

61. Is there a rhetorical force to the conditional? Cf. c. 76, opening with a heartfelt conditional: "If a man has any pleasure recalling his earlier good deeds" (vv. 1–2: *si qua recordanti benefacta priora uoluptas / est homini*).

62. Green 2005, 264 ad 96.5–6.

63. Davis 1971, 299, drawing on Tränkle, citing "Propertius 1, 19, 5–6, 11–12; 4, 7, 71ff.; Second Elegy to Maecenas 161–165."

64. After Wray 2001a, 51–52.

65. Davis 1971, 302.

66. Catullus seems not to refer to necrophilia. I am not aware of an ancient source that does without comedy or satire.

67. Davis 1971, 301.

68. All quotations from Davis 1971, 300.

69. Whether this Caelius, associated with Verona, is the famous Marcus Caelius Rufus is a matter of some debate. In what follows I assume that the name "Caelius" encourages a close association among the poems in which it appears.

70. The imagery may be compared to 51.9–10: "thin beneath my limbs flows a flame," *tenuis sub artus / flamma demanat*, with shades in turn of the "flowing" imagery of cc. 68(a) and 101, discussed earlier, as well as evocation of the original in Sappho 31 (vv. 9–10): "thin down under my skin has run a fire," λέπτων / δ' αὔτικα χρῶ πῦρ ὑπαδερόμηκεν. Catullus's c. 51 and Sappho's c. 31 are discussed in chap. 7, with sources there.

71. For the force of demonstrative phrases like *hoc est* as sufficiently distancing for evaluation including irony and sarcasm, cf. Dido's exclamations to Aeneas about his divine writ: "Surely *this* is the gods' labor, *this* the concern that troubles their peace" (*scilicet is superis labor est, ea cura quietos / sollicitat*; 4.379–80). This evokes not so much disbelief as emotional disturbance.

72. Fitzgerald describes “the final ‘hail and farewell’” of c. 101 as “words that both accompany the ceremony and gesture toward a communication that transcends its inadequate formulae” (1995, 187), following Quinn (1970, 440–41), who suggests that *aue atque uale* “may have been part of the traditional ceremony” (Fitzgerald 1995, 281n6). Thomson confirms that it is “a formula, found on sepulchral inscriptions,” following Ellis and Kroll, who “cite between them *CLE* 1558.6; *ILS* 8143; *CIL* II 3490, 3512, 3519, 3686” (1998, 538 ad loc.). Both Fitzgerald and Thomson suggest comparison to Verg. *Aen.* 11.97–8: “eternal greetings from me, great Pallas, / and eternal farewell” (*salue aeternum mihi, maxime Palla, / aeternumque uale*).

73. Cf. 5.6: “we, once that brief light has set / must sleep one everlasting night” (*nobis, cum semel occidit brevis lux, / nox est perpetua una dormienda*).

74. Fitzgerald 1995, 210–11.

Chapter 6. “Feminized” Voices and Their Silences, Part 1

1. I am inspired by Judith Butler’s work on “interpellation” (e.g., 2004).

2. See, e.g., D’Ambra 2006; Lefkowitz and Fant 2005; Skinner 2005; Johnson 2003b; Lardinois and McClure 2001; Blundell 1995; Fantham et al. 1995; Pomeroy 1995.

3. C. 10 may satirize Catullus’s activity and, so, deflate the agency it depicts, for he arguably ends up failing as a character, bested by the woman in witty conversation, even as he therefore succeeds as a poet composing a poem of enduring wit. For a cogent reading of these dynamics, culminating in a “failure of masculinity,” in c. 10, see Nappa 2001, 85–93 (and to 105 for context including discussion of cc. 28 and 47).

4. On the term “epyllion,” see Most 1982 and 1981, 111n2; and Reilly 1953. Scholarship on c. 64 is large and diverse. I have found especially helpful O’Hara 2007, 33–54; Hurley 2004, 96–114; Gaisser 1995; Janan 1994, 107–12; Laird 1993; Courtney 1990; Skinner 1984; Thomas 1983; Townend 1983; Traill 1981; Glenn 1980–81; Konstan 1977; Daniels 1972; Bramble 1970; Kinsey 1965; Putnam 1961; Thomson 1961; Beyers 1960; Hutton 1942; and Ramain 1922.

5. C. 64 is too long to quote in its entirety. Passages selected for close reading are quoted in the chapter.

6. For Catullus’s description of the coverlet as visual instead of narrative, cf. Thomson 1998, 402 ad v. 61: “C[atullus] likens the figure of Ariadne, as depicted on the *uestis*, to that of a Bacchant *carved in stone*: this in itself suggests that at this point he conceives himself to be *describing* something fully visualized” (italics in original), a suggestion Thomson emphasizes ad v. 60 (402): “C[atullus] not only (i) recurs to the same scene after digressing, but also (ii) in handling his material sometimes appears to adopt the method of narrative, and not of description at all.” Catullus seems to describe a depiction of Ariadne in one position only, lamenting on the shore, which in turn prompts his sometimes-description

and sometimes-narration of scenes related in the story but seemingly not depicted on the coverlet. Imagining Ariadne as literally depicted only once and therefore in one attitude would perhaps help to account for how she loses her clothing at vv. 63–67 but is (later? still?) described as clothed at v. 129. The term translated as “coverlet,” here *uestis*, is less specific in the Latin, meaning any kind of cloth or clothing. This ambiguity is exploited throughout the poem; see further discussion in this chapter.

7. Catullus seems to innovate in presenting Thetis and Peleus as a happy pair. They fall in love at first sight (vv. 19–21; cf. vv. 334–36) and are hymned by the Parcae in a “happy light” (*laeta . . . luce*; v. 325). In other versions of the story, Thetis is not totally willing: e.g., Hom. *Il.* 18.433–34: “to dare being married to a human man [she] was very much unwilling” (καὶ ἔτλην ἀνέρος / εὐνήν πολλὰ μάλ’ οὐκ ἐθέλουσα). Thomson says that “the notion of ‘love at first sight’ is found only in C[atullus’s] version of the story” (1998, 396). Cf. Romain 1922.

8. Cf. Catullus’s description after the song is finished: “the Parcae sang the song from divine breast” (v. 383: *carmina diuino cecinerunt pectore Parcae*).

9. On the chorus in Greek tragedy, see, e.g., Rehm 1992, 51–60.

10. On the Parcae’s weaving, I have benefited from conversation with students in a course surveying Latin literature, Bard College fall 2011, especially Caelie Butler and Rachel Thompson, both ’15. Per their suggestion, the Parcae “continually carding” while they sing (v. 320: *uellentes uellera*) might be read as accumulation of enough lifelines so that, when their spinning resumes, the close-packed deaths of the Trojan War may take place “all at once.”

11. Cf. Thomson 1998, 427–28: “This lengthy description of the Parcae is indulged in for its own sake (the love of minute detail is of course Hellenistic) and as a conscious digression, although it enhances the atmosphere of the wedding scene. To invest mythical and divine figures with the outward frailties of everyday mortals, and to show them in common tasks on a domestic scale, is very much in the vein of such Alexandrian writers as Callimachus. It is not easy to recover the peculiar piquancy it possessed for the ancient mind.” For the “domestic scale” of divine activity, cf. Catullus’s “seem[ing] to insist on the notion that Athena . . . built the [Argo] with her own hands” (394, with Thomas 1979 and Traina 1972), and Virgil’s comparison of Vulcan’s labor at the forge to a housewife’s nightly weaving (Verg. *Aen.* 8.408–15, with description of smithing through 453). That the divine would have a hand in human households is not wholly positive: even as this poem concludes by preferring such a mixture to the present world from which the gods have flown, as a result of the mixture women or otherwise feminized figures end up importuned.

12. For the white robes, cf. Pl. *Resp.* 617c.

13. “For the sake of red-white contrast, dear to Roman poets in particular, which he develops in the juxtaposition *roseae niueo*” (Thomson 1998, 434).

14. Thomson 1998, 434.

15. In this poem so replete with strings, it is possible to read the “string” by which Theseus extricates himself from the labyrinth as analogous to the string that ideally would have encircled Ariadne’s neck. The neck string would seem, then, to evoke death by hanging.

16. Thomson compares *Il.* 21.15–21 and 218–20 and cites Kroll to raise the question of “why C[atullus] chooses to celebrate the *uirtutes* of Achilles by singling out this berserk massacre (and by the death of Polyxena, 362) rather than by (e.g.) the slaying of Hector, as we might expect. No wholly convincing answer has yet been given” (1998, 432 ad 359). For some proposed answers, see, e.g., Boës 1988; Skinner 1984; Dee 1982; Knopp 1976; Daniels 1972; Kinsey 1965; Beyers 1960.

17. For paleness and “pallor of death,” cf. the discussion of Attis’s bloodshed in chap. 7.

18. Cf. *Lucr.* 1.92 (Iphigeneia falling to her knees; for her sacrifice, 1.80–101) and 4.952–53.

19. A point of comparison in this connection would of course be with Penelope as she is figured in the *Odyssey*, continually weaving and unweaving a cloth for Laertes’s funeral, weaving to placate the suitors and unweaving to hold them off. In Penelope’s hands, weaving is a means of control; on the other hand, her reliance on it also figures a kind of dependence or domestication, as she literally embodies the household and so, we may say, is unable to be unstitched from it as a place of traditionally gendered practices. May something be made of how Telemachus kills the handmaids, who in his and Odysseus’s view collectively betrayed the household to the suitors, not with a sword but by hanging them with household linens? For some thoughts on Telemachus and weaving together, see Stevens, forthcoming.

20. V. 2: *dicuntur*; v. 19: *fertur*; vv. 76 and 124: *perhibent*; slightly different, v. 212: *ferunt*, respectively.

21. So Thomson 1998, 396: “The version of the story given by C[atullus] is unusual; hence no doubt his insistence that he relies on tradition,” referring to his note ad v. 2 *dicuntur*, after Kroll, “express[ing] . . . C[atullus’s] dependence on tradition.”

22. Cf. Virgil’s Dido, who does not seem to know, at least at first, that she is in an epic, not a love poem. Thus Aeneas exhorts her to stop inflaming him and herself with her *complaints* of the sort precisely characteristic of love elegy (*Aen.* 4.360: *desine meque tuis incendere teque querelis*).

23. Other words in these passages also emphasize Ariadne’s central importance to the poem by recalling other moments in it. E.g., *indomitos* contrasts Ariadne in her *furores* with her half-brother, the Minotaur, who is *indomitus* only in simile (v. 107) and ultimately “dominated” indeed, “his body overmastered,” *domito corpore* (v. 110); like him, however, she may be reckoned *indomita* only by extension and not in her person. Similarly, *multiplies* (v. 250: *multiplies animo*

uoluebat saucia curas) picks up on the poem's pervasive theme of weaving in its etymology, "many-threaded"; that line seems to have inspired Virgil (*Aen.* 4.1: *at regina graui iamdudum saucia cura*).

24. Thomson 1998, 403 ad loc.

25. Would reference to that shape be paralleled? My impression is that Roman authors refer more often to firmness or pertness, on the analogy of flowers newly in bloom, than to fullness. In this they seem to follow the Greek (or Athenian literary?) preference for small or bound breasts; see Gerber 1978.

26. Vv. 140–41: *non haec miseram sperare iubebas / sed conubia laeta, sed optatos hymenaeos*. Thomson 1998, 411–12 ad loc. notes that "this line, with its feminine caesura in the third foot, could easily be read as the two concluding lines of a stanza such as we find in the wedding poem, poem 61," and compares *Aen.* 4.316 ("Virgil . . . recognizes its distinctive rhythm"); we might compare Aeneas's protestation to Dido that he "never called their affair a marriage" (*Aen.* 4.337–39). The following lines offer further confirmation of Catullus's sympathy for Ariadne, as she describes her inability to trust in terms that echo his own from c. 70. She says that Theseus's promises "were snatched as a wasted bunch by the airy winds" (*quae cuncta aërii discerpunt irrita uenti*; v. 142) and as a result exhorts that "no woman from this moment on trust a man who promises . . . [since] so long as their spirit longs for the taste of something, there's nothing they're afraid to swear, nothing they'll spare to promise" (*nunc iam nulla uiro iuranti femina credat / . . . / quis dum aliquid cupiens animus praegestit apisci, / nil metuunt iurare, nihil promittere parcut*; vv. 143–46). In c. 70, Catullus speaks similarly of having learned not to trust Lesbia: "what a woman says to her desirous lover ought to be written in the wind and running water" (*mulier cupido quod dicit amanti, / in vento et rapida scribere oportet aqua*; vv. 3–4). Although in c. 70 the tables are turned, the similarity of language suggests a feeling the poet shares with his subject, namely, that words are untrustworthy. Cf. c. 72, especially for the moment of realization: "now—too late—I know what you are" (v. 5: *nunc te cognoui*), which has, however, little effect on the wretched lover's feeling of love (vv. 7–8: *amantem iniuria talis / cogit amare magis*).

27. Thomson notes that the passage parallels Nonnus, *Dion.* 47.390–95 "so strikingly similar[ly] . . . that it argues . . . a common source" (1998, 413); cf. *Hom. Il.* 3.409–11.

28. "Made to stand apart from myself" translates *exsternata*, from "the rare (and poetical) verb *exsternare*" (Thomson 1998, 414 ad v. 165), generally taken to mean "scared out of one's wits."

29. C. 65 v. 6: *pallidulum manans alluit unda pedem*; and v. 67: *ipsius ante pedes fluctus salis* alludebant, respectively.

30. Cf. c. 51, discussed in chap. 7, exploring the desirous implications of the gaze among other sense perceptions as Catullus regards another man regarding Lesbia.

31. Cf. how no one in the poem is described as "hearing" the Parcae's

song. Catullus says only that “no later age will argue that [the song] is untrustworthy” (v. 322: *perfidiae quod post nulla arguet aetas*), a generalization that serves to justify his own moralizing. To the wedding guests’ pleased regard, we may also compare, with a different feeling, Aeneas’s incomprehension of the stories depicted on his divine shield (*Aen.* 8.730: *miratur rerumque ignarus imagine gaudet*): without access to the poem’s narrative ekphrasis Aeneas is unable to “hear” the stories told by Virgil to the reader.

32. Clearly it is not “sweet” for Catullus to see Ariadne in danger while he is not (cf. *Lucr.* 2.1–4) for he himself is, at least after his brother’s death, tossed about on similar seas.

33. For *reddere uoces*, cf. Anchises’s question upon seeing Aeneas: “Is it really given me to look, my son, on your face and to hear a voice familiar to me and to respond with my voice familiar to you?” (*Aen.* 6.698–9: *datur ora tueri / nate, tua et notas audire et reddere uoces*); see discussion in chap. 5.

34. Cf. *caecus*, meaning both “unable to see” and “unable to be seen,” as when Theseus’s thinking is clouded *caeca caligine*, “by a blind(ing) fog” (v. 207).

35. This development in Ariadne’s thinking might represent a difference from Epicureanism: she denies any *ratio* or “plan” for flight, and *ratio* is a word of particular importance and peculiar definition to Lucretius.

36. The language is conventional enough that its “allusions” are manifold (e.g., to Medea as represented by various authors). A more direct relationship is to the Catullus of c. 51, whose experience as a (would-be) lover isolated in feeling and reduced to looking on is framed in similar sense-perceptual terms; see further discussion in chap. 7.

37. Ariadne thus represents a sort of inversion of Philomela: whereas Philomela could not speak but only weave, in c. 64 Ariadne can speak but is literally woven.

38. Quoted material from Thomson 1998, 423 (after Kroll), who draws attention to “the onomatopoeia” in vv. 261–64, comparing *Lucr.* 2.618–20. For *bombos* he imagines “a deep vibratory hum, such as certain low-pitched wind instruments . . . produce,” comparing *Lucr.* 4.546, “the corrupt text of which also contains the words *raucum*, *barbara*, and (dubiously) *cita*” and thus might have served as inspiration for this passage in c. 64 and/or similarly for parts of c. 63, discussed later. To *tenuis tinnitus* we may compare c. 51’s *tenuis sub artus / flamma demanat, sonitu suo pte / tintinant aures* (vv. 9–11), discussed in chap. 7. Do the instrumental sounds cause physiological symptoms of sickness and excessive love, or vice versa? Does Catullus fall for Lesbia like a bacchant for Dionysus?

39. E.g., in 186 BCE, in the *senatus consultum de bacchanalibus*.

40. Thomson 1998, 372–73.

41. I am put in mind of how Yeats’s “Leda and the Swan” captures a human response to divine sublimity: helpless fear, the human “so caught up / So mastered by the brute blood of the air.” We may imagine Ariadne thus isolated

by the breakers, assaulted by the thunder, her utterance met only by the bizarrely raucous bacchic sounds.

Chapter 7. “Feminized” Voices and Their Silences, Part 2

1. On c. 63, I have found helpful or interesting Wray 2001b; Janan 1994, 101–7; Skinner 1997; Shipton 1987; Courtney 1985a; and Sandy 1968.

2. Other close similarities to Catullus, as he depicts himself in other poems, are noted later.

3. Cf. Thomson 1998, 374: “Whereas the typical Alexandrian poem would have been full of the details of the cult . . . C[atullus’s] poem . . . goes a step further, in a direction taken by much of his poetry: it is clearly in essence a tragedy . . . involving the principal character in a deed of blind fanatical devotion, and his subsequent repentance. The emotions arising from this situation are minutely analysed—this, indeed, is Alexandrian—but with a degree of personal passion added by the poet himself.”

4. Janan 1994, 105: “The inadequacy of Attis’ language to capture his situation highlights a conceptual insufficiency in the Symbolic, marked by *jouissance* and the feminine, that has reached out and claimed him.”

5. Cf. Janan 1994, 106: “The figure of Attis extravagantly expands upon the icons of Catullus’s suffering that dot the Lesbia cycle, but particularly upon his tortures in c. 11.”

6. For a succinct discussion of the meter, see Thomson 1998, 375–77.

7. To the “swift ship” already noted we may add the fact, well remarked on by Thomson, that the reason for Attis’s voyage is not belabored, so quickly does Catullus place us in *medias res*; this is an effective way of grounding the narrative in the main character’s psychology. Examples of the poem’s sustained interest—and the poet’s disinterest, in light of the narrator’s concluding request that “others be made rapid” (v. 93: *alios age rapidos*)—in speed may be multiplied. E.g., having been ferried, Attis is “swift of foot” (v. 2: *citato . . . pede*) to reach his final destination; and once having castrated himself, she/he is “swift to take in her snowy hands the light drum” (v. 8: *niueis citat cepit manibus leue typanum*). The “chorus” that follows her is likewise “swift with hastening foot” (v. 30: *citus . . . properante pede chorus*), literally and figuratively in her footsteps: “the rapid Gallae follow their hasty-footed leader” (v. 34: *rapidae ducem sequuntur Gallae properipedem*).

8. The connection may be stronger in light of an additional similarity to c. 80: at v. 74, Attis’s long expression of regret—as in c. 80, it comes the morning after—is described as having come from “rosy little lips” (*roseis ut hinc labellis sonitus <citus> abiit*), like Gellius’s “rosy little lips” (80.1: *rosea ista labella*). Taken together, these similar images of Attis and Gellius would seem to confirm that color changes are significant: in their cases, that a whitening of what is properly

red signifies an excessive feminization. May we think of Catullus and Gellius as somewhat similar in this connection?

9. Cf. Lucretius's description of Iphigeneia at the moment before her sacrifice: "she is raised by men's hands, trembling, and to the altar / led" (1.95–96: *sublata uirum manibus tremebundaque ad aras / deductast*). In a sacrificial context, such trembling could be considered inauspicious, suggesting the sacrificial victim's unwillingness and risking the displeasure of the gods.

10. For language as such, as opposed to speech or voice, as definitive of humankind, see the sources cited in the introduction, n. 10.

11. On masculinity and political power, and so on charges of effeminacy as a staple of political invective, see C. A. Williams 2010, 137–76; and Corbeill 1996, 128–73. For the paradox of feminine leadership, cf. the evidently self-conscious oddity of Virgil's phrase *dux femina facti*, "a woman was leader of the exploit" (*Aen.* 1.364, referring to Dido).

12. The epithets may be conventional but, I think, have special literal force here. I am reminded of Yeats's interest in writing a poem "maybe as cold / and passionate as the dawn," as he says in a poem that, like c. 63, is set by the sea ("The Fisherman").

13. I construe *nuntia* in the sense almost of "divorce." For the line, cf. Thomson on *geminas*: "This kind of expression is quite often used to emphasize a powerful impact made on the senses" (1998, 383–84).

14. On the lion in c. 63, see further Shipton 1987, 447–49.

15. On c. 51 I have found helpful Gaisser 2009, 79–80, 140–44, and 213–14 (on the "narrative" sometimes constructed, in which c. 51 is the beginning of the affair and c. 11 composed after its end, which Gaisser attributes in classical scholarship to Wilkinson 1953, followed by Fordyce (1961) 1987; Quinn 1970; and Thomson 1998, among others); Hurley 2004, 64–68 (focusing on "Catullus' use of the rhetorical technique of self-address"); Greene 1999 with Miller 1993 (the poem in a cycle of poems); and Janan 1994, 72–76. C. 51 is productively read in its immediate context of c. 50 (discussed in chaps. 1 and 3); on the two together, see Wray 2001a, 96–109; Wray concludes about c. 51 that "if Lesbia is Catullus' *puella diuina* ('divine woman'), she is also what Cynthia would be to Propertius: his *scripta puella* ('written woman')" (108; citing Lieberg 1962, 82–283; and Wyke 1987), for "both poems [sc. cc. 51 and 11] are notes passed, quite behind her back, from one man's hand to another" (109).

16. Cf. Wray 2001a, 105: "The epistolary commerce [certain poems] represent and imply is transacted exclusively between men."

17. The controversy is over whether the final stanza, which is not to be found in Sappho's c. 31, belongs to Catullus's c. 51, and if so with what connection to the other stanzas' meanings, or has instead been linked to it incorrectly by the manuscript tradition.

18. Cf. Thomson 1998 ad loc.: "*misero* . . . appears to have been introduced

by C[atullus] in order to change the poem's direction by introducing the masculine gender."

19. In an attractive irony of textual history, part of that crucial moment, all of v. 8, is lost from the (lost) archetype ("Veronensis") and must be supplied. The suggestion seems generally followed (Thomson 1998, 328: "It is simpler, and more sonorous, than . . . any alternative restoration that has hitherto been suggested"; and Kroll compares Theoc. *Id.* 2.108), although as Thomson notes in his apparatus ad loc. "editors have supplied variously" (1998, 130: *uarie suppleuerunt editores*); as an example he quotes Parthenius, "what I may say in madness" (*quod loquar amens*), which I agree with Thomson in finding both more complicated and less sonorous. The source of *uocis in ore* seems to be a matter of some debate. Thomson 1998, 130 in his apparatus ad loc. attributes it to Ritter, seeming thus to follow Schwabe's 1886 edition. But Thomson also (96) directs his reader to Owen 1890, who writes that the suggestion of *uocis in ore* "seems to have been first made by Doering in his edition of 1834, to whom Schwabe (ed. 1866) assigns it."

20. Cf. 72, where Catullus is explicitly conflicted: Lesbia's actions have caused him to *like* her less, but yet he *loves* (vv. 7–8: *quod amantem iniuria talis / cogit amare magis, sed bene uelle minus*).

21. Janan 1994, 74–75. Cf. her observation: "C. 63, because it operates in the realm of mythology, can combine the Lesbia of 11 with the Lesbia of 51 in one figure at one time—in Cybele" (107).

22. Cf. Thomson 1998, 327: "The name 'Lesbia' would, then, be added not only as a disguise for the *amour*, but also in order to remind the reader of the poem by Sappho of Lesbos."

23. On Sappho in antiquity, see Most 1996, with reference to the history of her reception. Cf. the anecdote that the Athenian lawmaker Solon, when asked why he wished to learn one of Sappho's poems by heart, replied, "I just want to learn it and then die" (Ael. ap. Stob. Flor 3.29.58 [iii 638s. Wachmuth-Hense]). By contrast, Antipater of Thessaloniki refers to Sappho, among eight other female poets, as a "mortal muse" (*A.P.* 9.26); for this reference I am grateful to an anonymous reader of my manuscript.

Conclusion

1. On a poem's extension over time and its occupation of the voice, cf. Yeats's remark that "the purpose of rhythm . . . is to prolong the moment of contemplation" ("The Symbolism of Poetry," §3; in Ramazani, Ellman, and O'Clair 2003, 881).

2. See the discussion in the introduction, with sources noted in n. 6.

3. Literature is a kind of semiosis, operating according to cultural codes. For such codes in Latin literature, see Adams 2003a and 2003b; Corbeill 2003;

Krostenko 2001; Richlin 1992; Selden 1992; Skinner 2003; Wray 2001a; in general, see Eco 1979 and 1990; and Culler 2002.

4. For this sense of “spontaneity” in poetry, cf. the famous formulation of Wordsworth’s in his *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads*, defining poetry as “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility” (Gill 1984, 611). The “classical undersong” of Wordsworth, including his Latin, is well surveyed by Clancey 2000, esp. 3–24.

5. Merton 1949; Sontag 1969. Cf. the change from widespread amateur performance of music in the home to a generalized consumption by “listeners” of music performed by “professionals.” According to Adorno and Horkheimer, there is here a stultifying illusion of choice: “Something is provided for all so that none may escape” (1972, 123).

6. The calculations were made by astronomer Mark Whittle (n.d.). Having adjusted the scale of the sound waves to make them audible, he represents the sound as a “descending scream, building into a deep, rasping roar, and ending in a deafening hiss” over “the first 380,000 years of the universe.” “The primary [interval] evolves from a major to a minor third.”

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